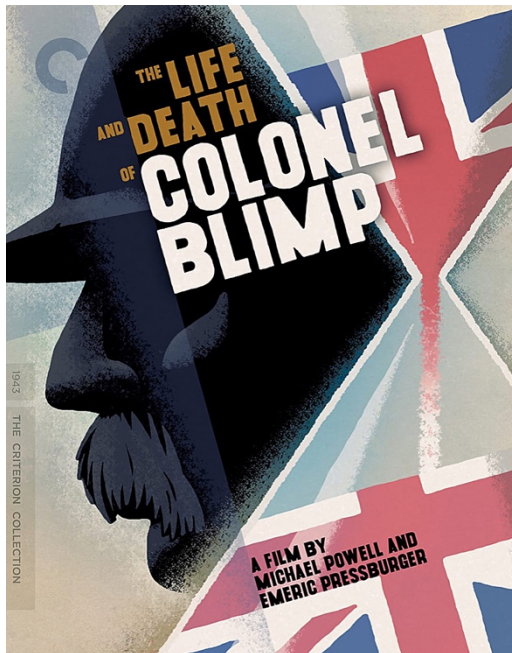


BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Notes on 251 British Films



HARRY OLDMEADOW

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For

*Lorraine Mortimer, Scott Murray, Rick Thompson,
Bill van der Heide*

Cover Photo: *King and Country*, 1963, Joseph Losey
Frontpiece: Poster, *Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*
1943, Powell & Pressburger

*A judgement is a personal judgement or it is nothing – you
cannot have your judging done for you.*

F.R. Leavis

Brief Encounters is a compilation of reviews, written in the last decade, of about 250 British films. Each entry is headed by the title, the year of release, an indication of genre, my rating (1-5) of the film, its IMDb score (1-10), country of release (invariably GB in this case), the names of the director, the DoP (not always included), and the leading players. The reviews are arranged alphabetically by film title. Films are indexed by both title and year. The genre indicators are generally pretty obvious:

- A** Action, Adventure, War (including combat movies, court-martials, and wartime thrillers but not domestic dramas set against a background of war)
- C** comedies
- D** dramas (something of a rag-bag category; many might, at a pinch, be squeezed in under generic rubrics)
- DC** documentaries
- G** gangsters
- H** horror/sci-fiction (often overlapping)
- M** melodramas
- N** noirs (used loosely to denote several different types of crime films, some of which could just as easily come under 'Th')
- PT** political thrillers, espionage stories, conspiracies
- Th** thrillers, mysteries, less noirish crime stories

The Index is followed by lists of my favourite British films and actors. The makers of *The Quiet Girl* and *The Banshees of Inisherin* may well be unhappy that these appear under the rubric of "British" films – but I wanted to squeeze them in anyway.

H.O.
Bendigo, 2024

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 MR DENNING DRIVES NORTH 1951
 OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS 1951
 POOL OF LONDON 1951
 BROWNING VERSION, THE 1952
 GIFT HORSE 1952
 HOLLY AND THE IVY, THE 1952
 HOME AT SEVEN 1952
 HUNTED 1952

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LONG MEMORY, THE	1952	GUNS OF NAVARONE, THE	1961
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EIGHT O'CLOCK WALK	1953	VICTIM	1961
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YESTERDAY'S ENEMY	1959	DISTANT VOICES, STILL L	1988
CRIMINAL, THE	1960	HANDFUL OF DUST, A	1988
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BRIEF ENCOUNTER, David Lean	1945
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OVERLORD, Simon Cooper	1975
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DISTANT VOICES, STILL LIVES, Terence Davies	1988
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MAN OF ARAN, Robert Flaherty	1934
LAWRENCE OF ARABIA, David Lean	1962
WINGS OF THE DOVE, THE, Iain Softley	1997
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REMAINS OF THE DAY, James Ivory	1993
INNOCENTS, THE, Jack Clayton	1961
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CRUEL SEA, THE, Charles Frend	1953
IT ALWAYS RAINS ON SUNDAY, Robert Hamer	1947
SERVANT, THE, Joseph Losey	1963
KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS, Robert Hamer	1949
SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, Ang Lee	1995
MAGGIE, THE, Alexander Mackendrick	1954
SATURDAY NIGHT & SUNDAY MORNING, Karel Reisz	1960
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BLACK NARCISSUS, Powell & Pressburger	1947
I BECAME A CRIMINAL, Alberto Calvacanti	1947
CANTERBURY TALE, A, Powell & Pressburger	1944
ENGLISHMAN ABROAD, AN, John Schlesinger	1983
LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN, THE, Basil Dearden	1960
LAST ORDERS, Fred Schepisi	2001
TUNES OF GLORY, Ronald Neame	1960
BILLY LIAR, John Schlesinger	1963
QUIET GIRL, THE, Colm Bairéad	2022

DIRECTORIAL HIERARCHY

From the top down:

Powell & Pressburger, Carol Reed, David Lean, Alex. Mackendrick
Jack Clayton, Terence Davies, Basil Dearden
Anthony Asquith, Robert Hamer, John & Roy Boulting
(Hitchcock, Losey, Chaplin ineligible)

BRITISH ACTORS 1940-1980

The Chocolate

Alan Bates, Dirk Bogarde, Tom Courtney, Albert Finney, Cary Grant,
Alec Guinness, Trevor Howard, Boris Karloff, James Mason, Laurence
Olivier, Michael Redgrave, Ralph Richardson, Peter Sellers, Alistair
Sim

Greer Garson, Wendy Hillier, Celia Johnson, Deborah Kerr, Margaret
Leighton

The Cream

Richard Attenborough, Richard Burton, Michael Caine, Robert Donat,
Leslie Howard, Charles Laughton, Roger Livesey, Herbert Lom,
Herbert Marshall, Ray Milland, John Mills

Peggy Ashcroft, Gladys Cooper, Joan Greenwood, Audrey Hepburn,
Valerie Hobson, Vivien Leigh, Anna Neagle, Joan Plowright, Vanessa
Redgrave, Rachel Roberts, Flora Robson

The Milk

Stanley Baker, Ronald Colman, Sean Connery, Cyril Cusack, Peter
Cushing, Denholm Elliott, Barry Foster, Edward Fox, James Fox, John
Gielgud, Marius Goring, Stewart Granger, Laurence Harvey, Jack
Hawkins, Christopher Lee, Kenneth More, David Niven, Anthony
Quayle, Basil Rathbone, Anton Walbrook, Michael Wilding

Julie Andrews, Claire Bloom, Julie Christie, Glenda Jackson, Angela
Lansbury, Margaret Lockwood, Sarah Miles, Hayley Mills, Yvonne
Mitchell, Charlotte Rampling, Sheila Sim, Jean Simmons, Sylvia Sims,
Ann Todd, Elizabeth Taylor, Virginia McKenna, Googie Withers

The Waste

Richard Harris, Peter O'Toole

Milk Gone Sour

Jeremy Irons, Ben Kingsley, Oliver Reed

Talented Comics, Oddballs & Quirkmasters

Felix Aylmer, Robert Hamer, Wilfrid Hyde-White, Dennis Price, Basil
Radford, Ernest Thesiger, Peter Ustinov, Joyce Grenfell, Margaret
Rutherford, May Whitty

Good Second Stringers

Nigel Bruce, Roland Culver, Gordon Jackson, Geoffrey Keen, Leo
McKern, Bernard Miles, André Morrell, Robert Morley, Cecil Parker,
Nigel Patrick, Jack Warner



39 STEPS, THE

1935 Th 4.00 7.8 GB2

Hitchcock, Alfred

Bernard Knowles

Robert Donat, Madeleine Carroll,
Peggy Ashcroft, Godfrey Tearle,
Lucie Mannheim

Hitch's wonderful adaptation of John Buchan's thriller about an innocent man who becomes inadvertently entangled in murder, espionage and sex with a cool blonde beauty (sound familiar?). Starting and ending in the theatre scenes which Hitch loved so much, anticipating the ending of the second version of **The Man Who Knew Too Much**. Shows Hitch's early mastery of montage, composition, POV shots, use of sound etc. Doesn't have the same smooth, seamless and apparently effortless cinematic élan which was first fully realized in **Rebecca** (1940) and **Shadow of a Doubt** (1943), nor that rich, dark vein of sexual tension and ambiguity of the masterworks – though there are tantalizing hints: handcuffed intimacy! – but it's still full of impressive instances of Hitch's 'pure cinema.



45 YEARS

2015 D 3.75 7.1 GB

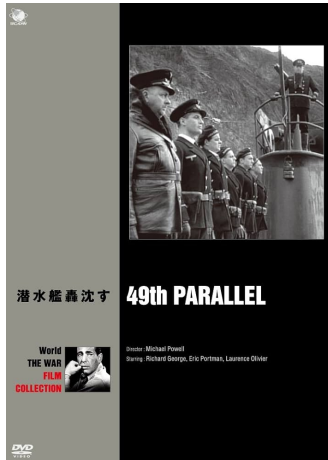
Haigh, Andrew

Lol Crawley

Charlotte Rampling, Tom
Courtenay, Geraldine James

Marital crisis 45 years in, following a revelation about something which happened before the two met. Story centers on the Charlotte Rampling character who is thrown into inner turmoil; very little happens in the outside world. This film is admirable in nearly every respect — a fine theme, superb understated acting, intelligent direction, subtle psychological shading, an appropriately ambiguous ending — but I found it just a teensy bit boring in the middle stretch. I did enjoy Charlotte Rampling in a different kind of role.

Good, in recent times, to see some thoughtful commercial films about older folk — **Amour**, **Youth** (not all that good), **Still Mine**, **Nebraska**, **The Straight Story**, **Trouble with the Curve**, **Last Orders** are a few that come to mind.



49TH PARALLEL, THE

1941 A 3.50 7.4 GB2

Powell & Pressburger

Freddie Young

Eric Portman, Raymond Massey,
Laurence Olivier, Glynis Johns,
Neil MacGinnis, Anton Walbrook

Kinda interesting British wartime propaganda film with a different approach, telling the episodic story of six escaped German submariners in Canada in the early phase of the war. The Hutterite chapter is the most interesting of the film which never achieves much grip or intensity. Some highly improbable passages with a fair amount of speechifying (pro- and anti-Nazi). Still, it's a change from the usual stiff upper-lip fare in the more conventional propaganda films of the time. Portman and MacGinnis are the mainstays of the film with a series of uneven cameos from Glynis Johns, Olivier, Massey and Trevor Howard. Some interesting ideas and some nice shading in the depiction of the Germans. A propaganda film with Nazi protagonists: a daring and imaginative idea. A sincere and intelligent film if not altogether successfully realised.

A ludicrous performance from Laurence Olivier, including a schoolboyish attempt at a French-Canadian accent. What was he thinking? Perhaps he needed to pay some bills.

A Chinese actor playing an Eskimo?



84 CHARING CROSS ROAD

1987 D 3.50 7.5 GB

Jones, David

Brian West

Anne Bancroft, Anthony Hopkins,
Judi Dench, Murice Denham

A love story in which the lovers never meet and nothing much happens other than an exchange of letters. A modest and tasteful adaptation of Helene Hanff's charming memoir which fleshes out a rather skeletal story line with a nicely understated contrast of post-war austerity in Britain and affluence in New York, and a deft juxtaposition of other transatlantic polarities. For once Hopkins (who is good) is upstaged — by Anne Bancroft who brings plenty of brio and conviction to her role. Cinematically undistinguished but a touching little film, nonetheless. Of course, being a book lover helps!

Occasionally a bit twee and one understands the impatience of some of the American critics. It's certainly a bit slow and very light on for any real drama. Most of the American critics seem to have panned this film mercilessly — not enough action, not enough drama, certainly no sex or violence, only a lot of nonsense about fusty old books, a minor writer in NY and a dullard in a London bookshop. Not many bibliophiles among them it seems, and not much appreciation of understatement!

The film was produced by Mel Brooks, Bancroft's husband. Helene Hanff died in 1997, aged 80. Anne Bancroft died in 2005, aged 74. (Always loved her work.) Director David Jones worked mainly in theatre and television.



ACROSS THE BRIDGE

1957 Th 4.25 7.3 GB2

Annakin, Ken

Reginald Wyer

Rod Steiger, Bernard Lee, Bill Nagy, Marla Landi, David Knight, Noel Wilman

Karma at Work. Arrogant, wealthy and corrupt businessman, Carl Schaffner (Steiger) scarpers London when the cops are onto him. He flees to NYC, crosses the country by train to end up on the Mexican border with a false identity, a thick wad of dough, and a loveable dog (which he doesn't love!). Schaffner's plight becomes increasingly difficult. Grit, tension, pathos, dark ironies. Power, wealth, status ... all turn to ashes... or should we say mud! Neatly put together by director Ken Annakin. Shot in Spain. As usual, Steiger (as usual) flirts with the bombastic but brings an electric charge to his role. He thought this was one of his best performances; he wasn't wrong. Based on a Graham Greene short story; like many of his "entertainments", it's cast in the form of a thriller but has considerable psychological and moral complexity. We are in Greenland for sure! Some serious stretches in the plot. Flimsy sub-plot with the young couple who do not figure in Greene's story. A small, neglected gem, neither precisely cut nor perfectly polished...but a gem nonetheless.

Surveying Annakin's lacklustre CV one must suppose that this was his best film. It doesn't seem to have been afforded any critical attention. Pity — it's rather good. Glad someone somewhere had the sense to get it onto DVD!

Why not choose an Irishman (Willman) to play a Mexican cop? (He's actually pretty good.)



ALEC GUINNESS

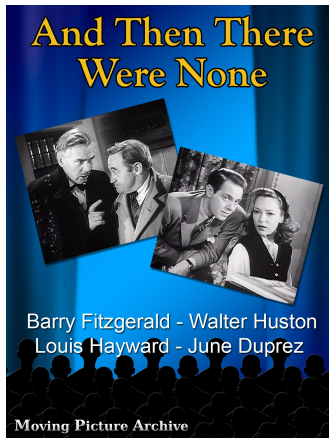
2003 DC 4.00 8.6 GB

Thompson, David

Colin Case

Alec Guinness, Piers Paul Read,
John Le Carré, Corin Redgrave,
Eileen Atkins, Ronald Neame et
al, Anne Kaufman

90 minute BBC doco about the sad life and illustrious career of one of England's finest actors with a whole gallery of interesting and often insightful talking heads, many of them well known figures in the theatre and cinema. AG's troubles, his elusive personality, obsessive privacy and sometimes cruel behaviour (particularly towards his wife), and his determination to be a "gent" seem to have been rooted in his shame and anxiety about his origins, his AWOL father, his chilly relationship with his mother, and his conflict and confusion about his own sexuality. The doco is probing, sometimes painful but also sensitive and respectful. Le Carré is one of the most interesting amongst many interesting commentators. Like many fine actors, especially those with a comic genius, AG's inner life was quite dark and disturbed. (One thinks of figures such as Peter Sellers, Tony Hancock, Spike Milligan, to mention just a few English examples.) The whole doco implicitly raises the troubling question of how much intrusion into a very private life can be warranted in the name of "uncovering the truth" and "the public interest". AG would not have enjoyed watching this though he would perhaps have been moved by the depth of the affection and respect many felt for him while being quite aware of his shortcomings and less attractive traits. The doco is also a reminder of Guinness' extraordinary career, especially in films. He may not have been the very best of the stage actors of his era — though he was up there — but he was certainly a better screen actor than Olivier and Gielgud, as was Ralph Richardson. One of the most pleasing and satisfying aspects of AGSM were the copious film clips showcasing the range, the sly humour, the subtlety of his performances. (The director is neither of the two well-known film critics of the same name.) The merits of this doco derive from the material itself rather than from any cinematic style which is altogether conventional.



AND THEN TH WERE NONE

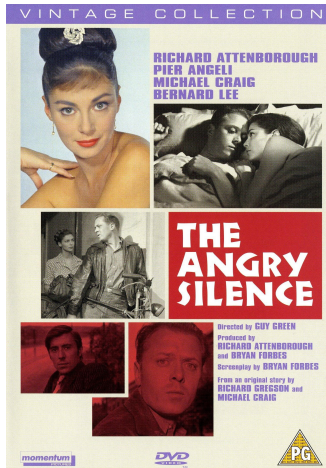
1945 Th 3.50 7.5 GB

Clair, René

Lucien Andriot

Barry Fitzgerald, Walter Huston,
Roland Young, Judith Anderson,
Aubrey Smith, June Duprez

Seven guests are invited by an unknown person to a remote island manor where they are attended by a butler and housekeeper. A gramophone recording accuses each of them of some crime hidden in their past. One by one they start dying in mysterious circumstances as it becomes clear that the killer is one of the nine people present. Who-dun-it? If you can get over a highly contrived and absurdly implausible plot this is quite a lot of fun. It keeps you guessing and the cast is congenial (apart from Mischa Auer who is a complete ham). Apparently a very faithful adaptation of Agatha Christie's novel by Dudley Nichols. However, I found it hard to discern anything distinguished in a film directed by someone with a reputation which seems to outstrip his achievements.



ANGRY SILENCE, THE

1959 D 4.00 7.2 GB

Green, Guy

Arthur Ibbetson

Richard Attenborough, Bernard Lee, Pier Angeli, Geoffrey Keen, Michael Craig, Penelope Horner

Factory floor drama about a wildcat strike and a solitary worker (Attenborough) who refuses to go along with the herd. It would be easy but misguided to read the film as an anti-union swipe; the real targets here are bullying, mob rule, unscrupulous labour leaders. The bosses don't come out of it well and there is a heavy emphasis on the fact that the workers' strike is not union-approved. Attenborough is fine in the lead role and Pier Angeli is unexpectedly engaging as his worried wife. Bernard Lee and Geoffrey Keen, both old pros, also deliver. Both the grimy working-class milieu and Tom's predicament are well depicted and the story develops some dramatic force. In some ways, coming from a different angle, it's a companion piece for the more union-sympathetic **I'm Alright Jack** (Boulting Bros, 1959) in which Peter Sellers gives us the unforgettable Fred Kite. (**The Angry Silence** is pretty thin on humour.) Both films give us some insight into disturbed industrial relations in the period.

Guy Green's most reputable film is probably **A Patch of Blue** (1965) but his finest hours were as the cinematographer on **Great Expectations** (46) and **Oliver Twist** (48). Pier Angeli's career, I unhappily report, was undistinguished. She died in 1971 at the age of 39 from a drug overdose.



ANNA KARENINA

1948 M 3.50 6.7 GB

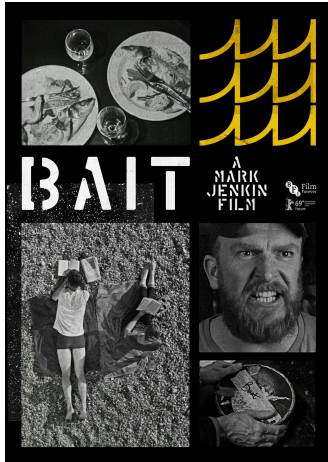
Duvivier, Julien

Henri Alekan

Vivien Leigh, Ralph Richardson,
Kieron Moore, Hugh Dempster,
Niall MacGinnis

Almost everything about this adaptation is quite impressive — fine performances from Leigh and Richardson, a sumptuous production, wonderful décor, costumes and sets, elegant cinematography ... even the kid is OK but Viv is not really playing her strong suit as an anguished mother. (The boy is a long way better than the truly awful Freddie Bartholomew in the 1935 version). Leigh isn't Garbo but she brings her own attractions. There is one huge problem: the incandescent sexual relationship of Anna and Vronsky is here turned into an altogether tepid, uninteresting and implausible affair with the wooden Keiron Moore a lifeless mannequin wheeled in and out for various scenes. What a pity they couldn't get Olivier for Vronsky as Korda (Britain's answer to David Selznick?) wished. (They didn't get Vronsky right in 1935 either!) Levin and Kitty aren't much more interesting than Vronsky. The snow scenes and nocturnal train shots are pretty amateurish compared to the rest of the film.

AK has been put on the big screen 18 times as well as several times on TV! This was the eleventh of the 18.



BAIT

2019 D 4.50 7.2 GB

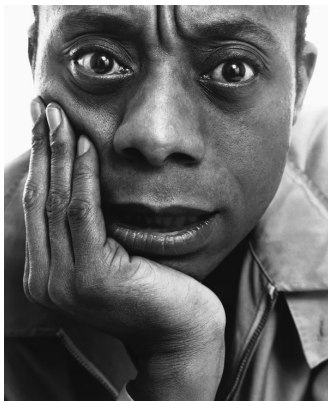
Jenkin, Mark

Mark Jenkin

Edward Rowe, Giles King, Chloe
Endean, Simon Shepherd,
Sandra Leigh, Stacey Guthrie

Cornish fishing village. Two brothers, fishermen, are facing tough times as the local economy is being overwhelmed by tourists and tourism while the fish are in short supply. Steve has surrendered to the times and now takes tourists on short cruises; Martin has lost the family cottage and his boat. Simmering tensions eventually come to a head in a tragic turn of events.

Written, shot on a 16mm Bolex, and directed by Jenkin. Grainy BW film stock, handheld camera, scratched images, jumbled soundtrack, jagged cross-cutting, made on the smell of a dead fish. Sounds dreadful but isn't; it is a surprising and engrossing film with some oomph. The style of the film put me somewhat in mind of Joseph Anderson's extraordinary **Spring Night Summer Night** (1976) and Shane Meadows' **Somers Town** (2008) as well as recalling various neo-realist, quasi-documentary and experimental films. One of the more daring and interesting works to come out of Britain in recent years. A salutary antidote to the high-gloss, mega-budget Netflix films which presently abound.



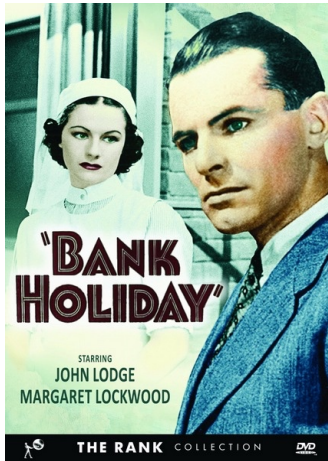
BALDWIN'S NIGGER

1968 DC 3.50 7.5 GB

Ové, Horace

1968. James Baldwin and Dick Gregory are in a smoky den in London, addressing a mixed crowd of folks interested in a web of issues around race and racism. Most of the film is given over to Baldwin's extemporized speech — eloquent, edgy, confronting, oscillating between fierce indignation and playful humour, full of insights. Gregory in a minor role. Lively Q & A. A kind of time-capsule of what was going on in those turbulent times. Shot in a pretty conventional style. Not as powerful as the much later **I Am Not Your Negro** but well worth a look.

Horace Ové (1939-2013) was an independent black filmmaker and photographer.



BANK HOLIDAY

1938 D 3.75 6.6 GB

Reed, Carol

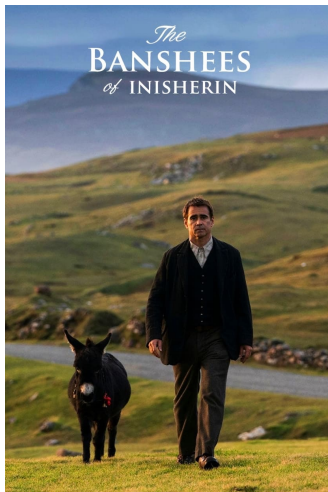
Arthur Crabtree

Margaret Lockwood, Hugh
Williams, John Lodge, Kathleen
Harrison

Three interwoven strands; a young man's wife dies after giving birth; a pair of engaged lovers head off on the Bank Holiday to Brighton; thousands of people are at the coast and we intermittently follow a few of them around. The link is Margaret Lockwood who is a nurse on the case, one of the young lovers, and one holiday-maker amidst the hordes. She has formed a bond with the bereaved husband, can't get him off her mind ... One of Carol Reed's early efforts — actually his sixth feature — and one in which we get more than a few glimpses of his directorial talents: the story is well structured with the many moving parts meshing nicely; there are some striking and memorable crowd sequences in London and at the coast; there are several very poignant moments. The humour is rather dated and often a bit heavy-handed, and there is completely overdone melodramatic episode in the film's closing moments. But the film has plenty of visual energy, is sharply observed and Margaret Lockwood delivers an endearing performance.

What happened to the poor baby?

AKA Three on a Weekend.



BANSHEES OF INISHERIN

2022 D 4.00 7.8 IRE

McDonagh, Martin

Ben Davis

Colin Farrell, Kerry Gordon,
Brendan Gleeson, Barry
Keoghan, Gary Lydon

1923, small island off Irish coast. Two close friends have a falling out when one of them goes completely cold on the friendship for no apparent reason. Dark and menacing events follow. Meanwhile the civil war goes on across the way...

The film has attracted almost universal acclamation and is a contender for the Best Pic Oscar. Not hard to see why: a dramatic story leavened with some dark humour, set in a harsh but beautiful locale against the backdrop of village life; shot in a lyrical style with glossy production values; a seductive admixture of comedy, satire, pathos, tension and tragedy with well-crafted dialogue and shifting patterns of sympathy and identification; convincing performances across the board, including a strong female part (wonderfully played by Condon) and a gallery of colourful secondary characters; the oblique but telling commentary on 'The Troubles'. BUT: McDonagh has a thing about nastiness, vengeance, violence, cynicism, foul language. Exhibit A: the truly awful but widely heralded Three Billboards Outside Ebbing. Exhibit B may well be In Bruges (not seen), Perhaps he's one of those fellows, like the Coens, who is too clever for his own good (and ours). Certainly wouldn't get my nod for Best Picture. But it's seductive entertainment. See it and make up your own mind.



BATTLE OF T RIVER PLATE

1955 A 3.50 6.7 GB2

Powell, Michael & EP

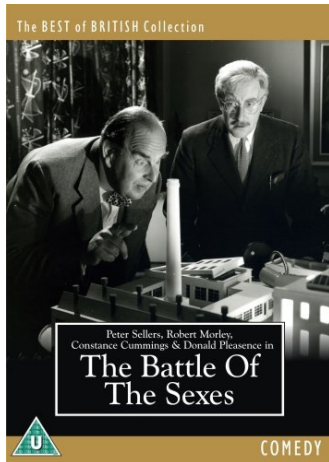
Christopher Challis

Anthony Quayle, Peter Finch,
John Gregson

Quasi-documentary style film about one of the first major naval encounters of WW2. Well crafted with some fine cinematography at sea and in Montevideo. Does create some tension. Very clean crisp print — excellent.

As with so many war action movies the character development is one-dimensional, and there is no moral complexity whatever. It's all frightfully British and everybody is a good chap, including the German naval commander (Peter Finch). Christopher Lee plays the canteen manager Manolo.

Aka **The Pursuit of the Graf Spree**



BATTLE OF THE SEXES, THE

1959 C 3.75 6.8 GB

Crichton, Charles

Freddie Francis

Peter Sellers, Constance Cummings, Robert Morley, Ernest Thesiger, Donald Pleasence

Based on James Thurber's story, "The Catbird Seat", about an ancient Scottish tweed company threatened by "new business methods" in the form of American "efficiency expert" Constance Cummings. Robert Morley is the company boss/buffoon who is entranced by the American and Peter Sellers the old fossil who leads the resistance. It's vaguely reminiscent of Mackendrick's dark comedies but it can't match them on any count — humour, edge, inventiveness. Nonetheless it's gently amusing and Peter Sellers is always worth watching (except in those "comedies" where the material is so putrid that even Sellers can't rescue it). Robert Morley? — well, you know what you're going to get. This is not an Ealing Comedy but it easily could have been.

Crichton: **The Lavender Hill Mob** (51), **Hunted** (52), **A Fish Called Wanda** (88).



BELFAST

2021 D 4.75 7.3 IRE

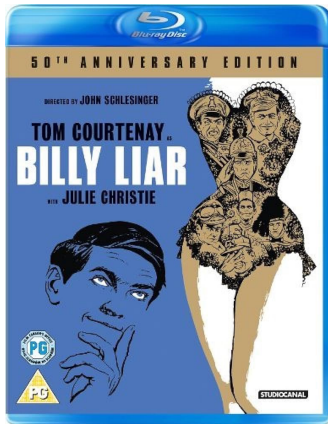
Branagh, Kenneth

Haris Zambarloukos

Jude Hill, Caitriona Balfe, Jamie Dorman, Judi Dench, Ciarán Hinds

Kenneth Branagh's loving family portrait drawn from reminiscences of his working-class Belfast childhood, framed by the political turbulence and violence of the late 60s and early 70s. Ten-year old Jude Hill does an astonishing job as the young boy Buddy – credible, amusing, endearing, touching. The sketchy plot is driven by the question of whether, in the face of escalating violence, the family should leave for England where the father (a joiner) has been offered a permanent job. An ensemble of well developed characters: parents, grandparents, brother, “girlfriend”, a priest, a rabble-rouser, street people. Beautifully shot in crisp BW with a superb score by Van Morrison, making great use of his own music and that of others. Street life, school, movies, games, outings – life going on in a working-class community amidst the violent maelström.

If you want to understand the root causes of the “Troubles” and the religious, social and ideological genealogy of the tensions which again exploded in Ireland in this period, **Belfast** is of little help. But this shouldn't count as a criticism of the film – one pressed by some reputable critics. The film does not aspire to any historical or political analysis: its motive force is as love-song to a family, a place, a community, a purpose which it fulfils with some style, humour, sensitivity and sincerity. It's too good to be dismissed as a “crowd-pleaser”; it *is* a crowd-pleaser, but of a distinguished kind. I loved it.



BILLY LIAR

1963 C 4.00 7.4 GB

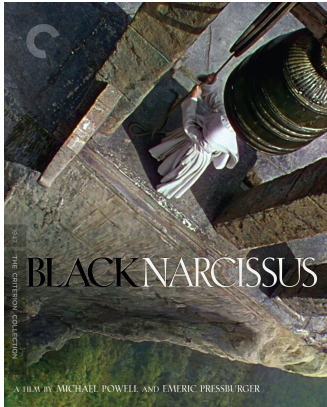
Schlesinger, John

Denys Coop

Tom Courtney, Julie Christie,
Wilfrid Pickles, Mona
Washbourne, Finlay Currie,
Helen Frazer

One Day in the Life of Billy Malingerer. Scripted by Keith Waterhouse from his own novel. This is a kitchen-sinker, a depiction of mid-century working-class life in northern England, but instead of the generic angry/wild young man we have Billy who is a hopeless (and hapless) fantasist and malingerer who has a knack for trouble. He has a humble job at a funeral parlour. (The milieu is really lower middle class rather than working class proper.) As his name suggests, Billy is a congenital liar and is a bit disconnected from reality. Courtenay handles a challenging role very adroitly in this bitter-sweet comedy which reveals as much about the cramped horizons and grey walls of the life in which Billy is imprisoned as did the grimly realistic heavy-duty dramas of the kitchen-sink sub-genre (Tony Richardson, Ken Loach, Lindsay Anderson et al). Julie Christie is engaging in one of her earliest roles. One critic described the film as “light on its feet”, a very apt observation. Intelligently directed by Schlesinger in only his second feature (following **A Kind of Loving**). It's not a knock-down runaway winner but its deftly done... I liked it quite a lot. (Schlesinger's best film?) Rita is really a one-dimensional caricature, and Barbara is not much better.

Albert Finney played Billy in the stage production, directed by Lindsay Anderson, which preceded the film. The film was shot by Denys Coop, also behind the camera for **This Sporting Life**. I'm glad to have seen this. I remember the book very fondly from undergraduate days (late 60s).



BLACK NARCISSUS

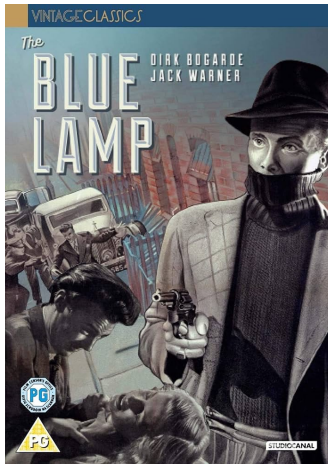
1947 M 4.25 8.0 GB

Powell & Pressburger

Jack Cardiff

Deborah Kerr, David Farrar,
Kathleen Byron, Jean Simmons,
Flora Robson

Based on Rumer Godden's story about the tensions (mainly sexual) in a remote English nunnery high in the Himalayas, configured around Sister Clodagh (Kerr), her alter ego, Sister Ruth (Byron), and the handsome local agent (Farrar). It comes with most of the hallmarks of the Powell-Pressburger corpus — extravagant theatricality; lavish décor, rich mise-en-scène and bold cinematography (Jack Cardiff); nuanced performances; an intelligent and sensitive treatment of the material at hand, ranging from lurid melodrama to delicate pathos to intimations of the spiritual and supernatural. Farrar and Kerr are wonderful, and Kathleen Byron does a pretty good turn as the locus of desire, repression and hysteria. The “artificial” look of the film (including sets, choreography, use of matte and process photography) evinces P&P's interest in the theatre and ballet. The themes of the film are by no means as schematic as some of the critics seem to think: ambiguity, irony and counterpoint all provoke and problematize, allowing the viewer some room to construct alternative readings. Some of the material was considered daring and controversial at the time; in today's climate it looks like a model of tact and restraint (leaving aside Sister Ruth's hysterical outbreak which is pretty much in your face). Almost everything to do with the locals is badly done! The Jean Simmons character, the ayah and the young prince are all ludicrous and not untouched by some of the racial stereotypes of the period. Hard to know to what extent the political ironies were deliberate. The novel was published in 1939, the film made in 1947, the year of India's independence. Several of Godden's other works were also adapted for the screen, including **The River** (Jean Renoir). Despite the shortcomings in the treatment of the Indians, the film's many merits make its deficiencies seem rather minor. The whole thing really hinges on Deborah Kerr's inner drama — and she is simply magnificent — and on the outer surface. The film is beautiful to watch, absorbing, imaginative, intelligent: drama, one might say, for serious-minded adult viewers!



BLUE LAMP, THE

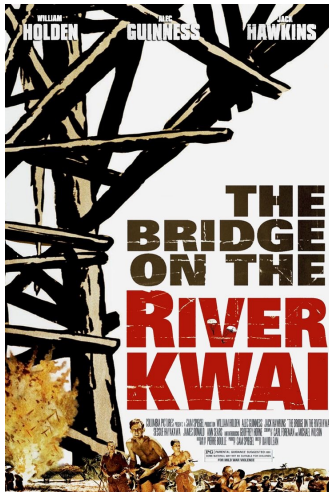
1950 Th 3.75 6.9 GB2

Dearden, Basil

Gordon Dines

Jack Warner, Dirk Bogarde,
Bernard Lee, Peggy Evans,
Jimmy Hanley, Gladys Henson,
Robert Flemyng

The grandfather of many British TV police procedurals. Nicely filmed on location in a realistic, semi-documentary style and graphically evoking not only the physical milieu but the moral climate of post-war Britain. Episodic structure with the punks tracked down by methodical police investigation. The innovative aspect of the film is the foregrounding of police procedures and the daily business in a police station with the crime storyline being some what secondary. The coppers are all a bit too decent to be true but the overall effect is convincing. Dixon's death is nicely handled. Dirk Bogarde does well in his first major role and I always enjoy Jack Warner and Bernard Lee at work. Peggy Evans as the girlfriend is the weak link in the cast. Alexander Mackendrick had a hand in the script. Nicely shot by Gordon Dines Made the year after Dassin's **The Naked City** — TBL's deficiencies are underscored by the comparison. Nonetheless an important work in the history of British film which still stacks up pretty well but Dearden's next effort, **Pool of London** (1951) was better.



BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI

1958 A 4.00 8.2 GB2

Lean, David

Jack Hildyard

Alec Guinness, Sessue Hayakawa, William Holden, Jack Hawkins, André Morrell

Absorbing character-driven war drama about the clash of two strong-willed personalities who are both fixated on “duty”: Guinness and Hayakawa are both brilliant as the respective officers. Tension, humour, ambiguity and epic scale. The William Holden sub-plot is labored and less interesting than the Nicholson-Saito confrontation. Slight whiff of the Oscar-hunt about it (it won seven of them!). Filmed in Sri Lanka. Some people claim this is the best British film ever made. Well, it’s pretty good, but...



BRIEF ENCOUNTER

1945 D 5.00 8.1 GB

Lean, David

Robert Krasker

Celia Johnson, Trevor Howard,
Stanley Holloway, Joyce Carey

Noel Coward's sensitive, under-stated script + two lower echelon actors + a modest budget + Robert Krasker's superb cinematography + David Lean's tactful, restrained but inventive direction = a poignant, bitter-sweet romance which is utterly convincing. Celia Johnson is seriously good, as is Howard. The use of locations, especially the railway station, is superb, and the thematic resonances of the cinema scenes flow quite naturally from the narrative material. The twice-seen ending — more precisely the penultimate scene — is powerful and excruciating indeed, all the more so for being so controlled. (Although the film shares many of the characteristics of the classical melodrama it can't really be categorized as such, partly because it lacks the hysterical edge: better typed as a romantic drama.) Sometimes a train is just a train? Well, yes, sometimes...The voice-over narration is sometimes quite superfluous, and the musical soundtrack is occasionally intrusive. (The film is generally more wordy than it need be.) The last line in the film (from the decent but boring husband) is unconvincing and rather squibs it. But these are small quibbles next to the film's many merits. Some of the reviews are incredibly obtuse, insensitive and crass, largely because the social and moral climate is now so different. Whatever one may feel about the moral codes which the film apparently endorses (but which it obliquely critiques as well), this shouldn't prevent one from understanding the predicament in which the characters find themselves. Some philistines have also described the film as "boring", "stuffy" and "stodgy": they have been playing too many video games and watching too much TV! Lean's style has also mistakenly been called "realistic", "naturalistic", "functional" and "pedestrian"; all well wide of the mark because his style is actually allusive, suggestive and poetic. I always had Noel Coward pinned as a cynic — not here! This was one of my mother's favourite films: she had taste! Is this David Lean's best film? Yep. The BFI Film Poll ranked it the second best British film ever, behind **The Third Man** (Carol Reed, 1949) and in front of **Lawrence of Arabia** (also Lean, 62).



BRIGHT STAR

2009 D 3.50 6.9 GB

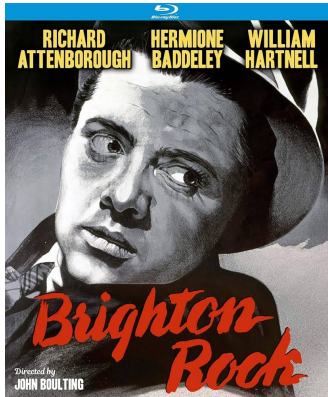
Campion, Jane

Grieg Fraser

Abbie Cornish, Ben Whishaw,
Paul Schneider, Kerry Fox

The last three years of John Keats' life and his love affair with Fanny Brawne; first and only and last love! (How romantic can you get!) Meticulously mounted period/costume drama which is lush, sometimes intense, and impeccably played by Cornish and Whishaw with Paul Schneider as Charles Brown providing a useful foil. Edie Martin as Toots is quite adorable. The whole thing is shot in saturated colour with plenty of pastoral lyricism. The film does it best — not entirely successfully — to pay homage to Keats' poetry ... but Fanny Brawne is really, unsurprisingly, at the centre of the film.

This is one of those very well crafted films of serious intent, and almost everything about it shows signs of the taste, restraint and intelligence of the film-makers — all highly commendable. Compared to most Hollywood romances it's honey and lemon rather than fairy floss. I don't want to be a wet blanket but I must confess I found it all just a little tedious. Also: the obvious stratagem of matching Keats' verbal beauty with pictorial prettiness is not quite as successful as it might have been. (I wanted to like this more than I did. Overall I preferred Terence Davies film about Emily Dickinson, **A Quiet Passion** which covered some of the same thematic terrain.)



BRIGHTON ROCK

1948 D 3.75 7.4 GB2

Boulting, John

Harry Waxman

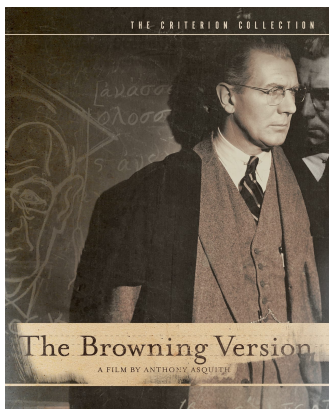
Richard Attenborough, Carol Marsh, Hermoine Babbdeley, William Hartnell

Terence Rattigan and Graham Greene adapted Greene's lurid 1938 novel about a psychopathic punk hoodlum and the seedy milieu of the Brighton underworld in the interwar years. Attenborough gives a menacing performance while Carol Marsh and Hermoine Baddely are both excellent. It's dark, dramatic, powerful and nasty. (How tawdry are the English seaside "resorts"!)

Some of the effects are a bit overdone and today look a bit amateurish (eg; the tunnel of horrors). The final convent scene felt out of place, a kind of tack-on to allow a bit of not very convincing sermonizing. The theological overtones of the novel are not well assimilated into the drama. (The stuck record was imposed at the end; Greene & Rattigan had the record playing its true message.)

Despite being a massive Greene fan I've never been an admirer of **Brighton Rock** which struck me as perverse, misogynistic and acrid book (which is not to deny its power): to be sure Greene's writing talents are on display but so are many of his peculiar preoccupations, especially his suspicion of sexuality (sex in Greene is almost always joyless, bleak, dispiriting). The film doesn't encourage me to revise my opinion though Greene's talents are undeniable — and, no doubt, give the film its peculiar force. Given my distaste for the novel I've hitherto avoided this film; my instincts were right but it's a film which should be seen by any student of the British cinema.

Brighton Rock is a kind of candy: this ain't!



BROWNING VERSION, THE

1952 D 4.75 8.2 GB

Asquith, Anthony

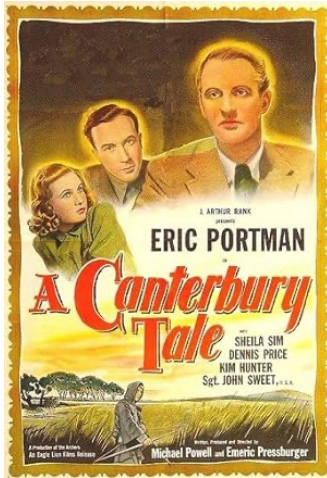
Desmond Dickinson

Michael Redgrave, Jean Kent,
Nigel Patrick, Wilfrid Hyde-White

In the best classical British style of the 40s and 50s— understated, self-effacing, restrained, and measured — and all the more affecting for being so (Hollywood take note). No doubt some would call it “old-fashioned”, both as a play (by Terence Rattigan) and as a film. An intelligent and compassionate study of failure. Michael Redgrave is seriously good as the classics teacher with a mediocre career, unsympathetic colleagues, a faithless wife and uncomprehending students; brings real pathos to his role. When the repressed emotion finally comes to the surface it is powerful and moving. A much less sentimental and much more disquieting film than the ever-popular **Goodbye Mr Chips** which is actually, and sardonically, referenced in this film.

It is a tribute to Albert Finney that his performance of the same role in Mike Figgis' 1994 re-make is also a *tour-de-force*, though perhaps “force” is not quite the word in this context! Finney gives the character a little more inner fortitude. But both give sensitive performances. The wife and headmaster are even nastier in the 94 version. (Hyde-Whyte is superb as the apparently genial but ruthless and manipulative headmaster in Asquith's film.) The BW of the 51 version is preferable to the picture postcard prettiness of the 94; it uses light and the architectural spaces beautifully.

Anthony “Puffin” Asquith was the son of British PM Herbert Asquith. Did his best work in the 40s and is mainly remembered for his film adaptations of Wilde and Shaw. One of his finest films, also based on a Rattigan play, was **The Winslow Boy**. He deserves a more elevated reputation than he apparently has amongst today's cine-cognoscenti.



CANTERBURY TALE, A

1944 D 4.25 7.7 GB

Powell & Pressburger

Erwin Hillier

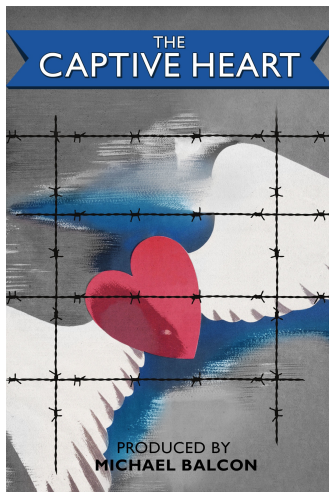
Eric Portman, Sheila Sim, Dennis Price, Sgt John Sweet

WW2. The lives of an American soldier, a young woman from London and an eccentric gentleman farmer converge on the pilgrimage trail to Canterbury. A beguiling, lyrical and whimsical ode to rural England and the old ways in the face of a mechanical and industrialized war. Eric Portman (with a touch of the Roger Liveseys) and Sheila Sim embody a kind of “Englishness”, nicely set off by Bob, the American soldier (Sweet). The narration and treatment of the story are imaginative and unusual, displaying Powell-Pressburger’s interest in the mystical and the supernatural. The Chaucerian motif works well. The film is visually beautiful, poetic, full of amusing and touching sequences, and something quite different from standard wartime fare.

The whole “Glue Man” side of the story is really rather silly and a bit weird. More false endings than a Beethoven symphony! Everything works out in the end even if the narrative resolution is perhaps just a bit facile.

Sheila Sim was married to Richard Attenborough for nearly seventy years, until his death in 2014. She’s still going and would now be 93.

This was better wartime propaganda than a hundred submarine films! The “why we fight” theme is all the more effective for being oblique. Along with **Colonel Blimp**, **Red Shoes**, **Black Narcissus** and **I Know Where I’m Going** this is clearly one of Powell-Pressburger’s masterworks.



CAPTIVE HEART, THE

1946 A 4.00 7.1 GB

Dearden, Basil

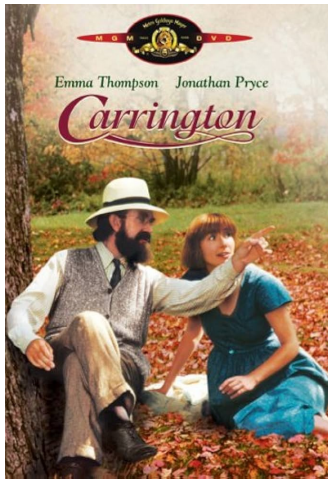
Douglas Slocombe

Michael Redgrave, Basil Radford,
Gordon Jackson, Jimmy Hanley,
Rachel Kempson

Interweaving stories of a group of men in a German POW camp for the duration of the war, and of their loved ones back home. Can't avoid some of the tropes and clichés of the wartime flag-wavers and the POW sub-genre but well directed, shot (Douglas Slocombe) and performed with some beautiful moments handled with tact and sensitivity. Captures the frustration, boredom, heartache, despair and loneliness of captivity as well as the usual fare (resilience, camaraderie, patriotic spirit, theatrical hi-jinx, makeshift games etc). The premise of the central romance is a bit fanciful (but not impossible). Largely shot in Marlag camp, near Hamburg, in the British Zone.

As this was made in the Ealing Studio with British cast and crew it is hard to see how it appears in the "Hollywood Classics" series; I suppose "Hollywood" is a rather elastic term!

Rachel Kempson (Celia) was married to Michael Redgrave and is the mother of Vanessa, Lyn and the rest. There is a Jack Lambert in the film (the padre) ... but not *the* Jack Lambert of countless Westerns and noirs.



CARRINGTON

1995 D 3.75 6.9 GB

Hampton, Christopher

Emma Thompson, Jonathan Pryce, Steven Waddington, Samuel West, Penelope Wilton

Bloomsbury? Well, depends on your vantage point; for some, a group of trail-breaking rebels and daring iconoclasts who broke the fetters of Victorian moralism and forged new modes of self-expression in both art and life; for others (myself included) a rag-tag bunch of second-rate self-congratulators with massive egos and minor talents, essentially frivolous, privileged and narcissistic — a kind of self-appointed and snobbish intellectual and artistic “aristocracy”. The many moths who fluttered around this flickering flame included Virginia Woolf, EM Forster, Clive and Vanessa Bell, Maynard Keynes and Roger Fry. At the centre of this coterie was Lytton Strachey and at its fringes the artist Dora Carrington; this film is about their unusual relationship and their various tangential love affairs. This could easily have been a really awful film ... but it’s not bad. Production values, period details, costumes, décor etc are all impeccable, and the performances are good in an understated English sort of way. The violins occasionally get out of hand. Although the film is ostensibly centered on Carrington it’s dominated by the Lytton Strachey character, played with compelling conviction and some finesse by Jonathan Pryce. Elegant, witty, intermittently absorbing. I rather enjoyed it in spite of myself. One of the more interesting and congenial characters on the outskirts of Bloomsbury was Gerald Brenan who appears here as one of Carrington’s suitors. He later wrote a wonderful but now largely forgotten book, *The Face of Spain* (1950).

A serious contender for the Merchant-Ivory Trophy for Tasteful “Literary” Drama?



CARRINGTON V.C.

1955 D 4.00 7.0 GB2

Asquith, Anthony

Desmond Dickinson

David Niven, Margaret Leighton,
Noelle Middleton, Geoffrey Keen,
Allan Cuthbertson

Military court-martial drama about an officer who has apparently stolen funds from the company funds. Heavily birth-marked by its origins as a stage play but neatly packaged by the script-writers and briskly delivered by Anthony Asquith, who rarely turns in anything shoddy or second-rate. Certainly his material here is sub-Rattigan but he makes the most of it. You're not gonna bite your nails to the quick but it does generate some suspense along with some low-key humour and romance. The whole thing is frightfully English — and none the worse for that. Some location shooting at the Woolwich Barracks. Margaret Leighton and David Niven head a very competent cast; Geoffrey Keen lands a more interesting role than usual.



CASH ON DEMAND

1961 Th 4.00 7.4 GB

Lawrence, Quentin

Arthur Grant

Peter Cushing, André Morrell,
Richard Vernon, Norman Bird

A meticulously planned bank robbery in which the schoolmasterly bank manager (Cushing) must collude with the charming criminal mastermind (Morrell). Excellent support from Richard Vernon and the secondary characters. It has most of the virtues which we associate with the best British films of the period: a literate and amusing script (adapted from a play by Jacques Gillies), sharply drawn characters, a tidy plot, and a certain modesty (small budget, lack of effects, discreet soundtrack and so on). The changing play of our sympathies is nicely handled. The tension could not be described as electric but it works well enough. Some of the critics would no doubt grumble about the film's obvious provenance as a play (dialogue driven, one location only). I found it a very satisfying little outing. A Hammer production. (They did make non-horror films as well! And nice to see Cushing out of his usual habitat.)



CHANCE MEETING

1959 Th 3.75 6.7 GB

Losey, Joseph

Christopher Challes

Stanley Baker, Hardy Kruger,
Micheline Prele, Gordon Jackson,
Robert Felmying

London. French woman (Presle) is found murdered in her flat; a young Dutch painter (Kruger) is in the frame. Inspector Morgan (Baker) is on the case. Things become quite puzzling. A well-plotted, low-key thriller/procedural which, amongst other things, drills into class prejudices and assumptions about “background”. It’s efficiently assembled and nicely shot (Losey has not yet gone the Full Baroque — but there are signs!). The film is somewhat weakened by the implausible relationship between a sophisticated society woman and the rough miner’s son/artist. The plot keeps us guessing. Typical Johnny Dankworth-type score.

Worth seeing as a minor but interesting work in Losey’s *oeuvre* ... but he made better “minor” works on either side, **Time without Pity** (57) and **The Concrete Jungle/The Criminal** (60). The poster is a bit of an over-sell: *A story of SEX as frank as life itself!* [really?] ... *of MYSTERY as baffling as a nightmare.*

Unless we want “noir” to mean simply a dark crime film, this is not noir, as it is so often called.

aka: **Blind Date**



CHANCE OF A LIFETIME

1950 D 3.50 6.9 GB

Miles, Bernard

Eric Cross

Bernard Miles, Kenneth More,
Basil Radford, Niall McGinnis,
Josephine Wilson, Julien Mitchell,
Hattie Jacques

Post-war England. Agricultural machinery factory is falling on hard times with the workers getting increasingly disgruntled and restless. Factory owner (Radford) challenges the men to try running the show themselves. They face all sorts of problems but ...

A tidy little drama, a bit short of horse-power but nicely acted, and with a palatable enough message. But the British cinema chains refused to show it, backed up by the British Employers Confederation. We can't have this sort of Bolshie stuff! Harold Wilson, chairman of the Board of Trade, intervened to secure the film's distribution. It's actually rather mild medicine with rather a sunny view of the employers, the workers and the unions, and without much sting. But it was enough to alarm the Establishment! While not cinematically distinguished it's of considerable historical and sociological interest as a window onto post-war Britain. It was never in danger of raising my pulse-rate but I enjoyed it.

Josephine Wilson, the loyal secretary, was married to director Bernard Miles. Written by Bernard Miles and Walter Greenwood.



CHARIOTS OF FIRE

1981 D 3.50 7.2 GB

Hudson, Hugh

Ben Cross, Nigel Havers, Ian Charleson, Nigel Davenport, Ian Holm, Alice Krige

The more or less true story of two British runners who competed at the 1924 Olympic games: angry and ambitious young Jew, Harold Abrahams, and devout Evangelical Christian and Scot, Eric Liddell. Meticulously mounted period piece, an engaging story, plenty of colour and movement. If all you expect of the cinema is entertainment, this fills the bill nicely. There's plenty to like. But it's a typical Oscar-hunting picture: ample budget, some heavy hitters (mainly amongst the older characters: as well as Holm and Anderson we have John Gielgud and Patrick Magee) and, also crucial, we have a certain amount of *gesturing* towards "Serious Issues" — anti-Semitism, professionalism in sport, class, sport & politics — but nowhere does the film's treatment go more than a millimetre deep. Vangelis's hugely celebrated score stands up Ok but is less spectacular now than it was then. A feel-good crowd pleaser, by no means the worst of its kind, but undeserving of the critical gush it was accorded at the time. (So often the way with Best Picture Oscar Winners!) The rest of Hugh Hudson's directorial career has been grey, not to put it too unkindly. The best things in the film are the opening and closing sequences (running on the beach).



CHILDREN ACT, THE

2017 D 3.75 6.7 GB

Eyre, Richard

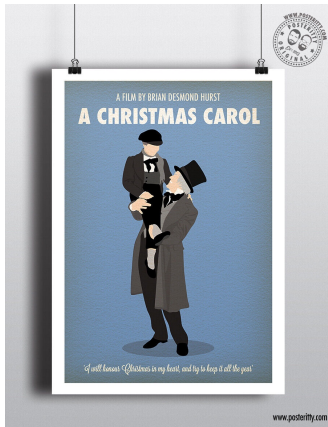
Andrew Dunn

Emma Thompson, Stanley Tucci,
Fionn Whitehead

Legal/courtroom drama with a twist — no crime! A teenager and his parents, fervent Jehovah's Witnesses, are refusing to allow a hospital to give him a blood transfusion because of their religious beliefs. His life is in grave danger. The court must decide if the hospital can give the transfusion. The judge, experiencing marital problems at home, visits the youth in hospital. Things get complicated.

Intelligent and stylish adaptation of Ian McEwen's thoughtful novel which explores various legal/moral/social issues with some sensitivity — but it's a bit bloodless ... perhaps not the most apposite image in the circumstances; let's say a bit clinical. Emma Thompson gives a fine performance, as she nearly always does. Fionn Whitehead is somewhat reminiscent of a young Tom Courtenay.

One critic: "If Emma Thompson can't make **The Children Act** ... into something interesting and meaningful, then no one can. And she can't." I would have said "And she can't altogether." So, not altogether satisfactory but worth seeing.



CHRISTMAS CAROL, A

1951 D 3.75 8.1 GB

Desmond-Hurst, Brian

CM Pennington-Richards

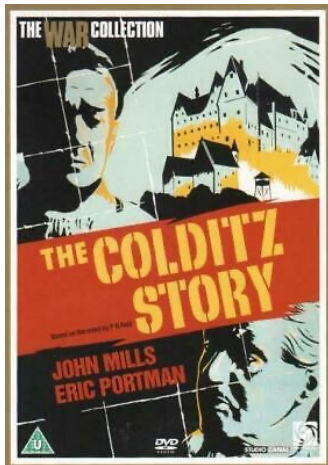
Alistair Sim, Jack Warner,
Kathleen Harrison, Mervyn
Johns. Michael Hordern, George
Cole

Highly theatrical adaptation of Dickens' Christmas classic which derives its motive force from the exuberance and sincerity of the players, most conspicuously, of course, Alistair Sim in an altogether magical performance (he makes Scrooge's transformation altogether believable and quite compelling) which quite overwhelms the direction which is no more than competent.

Bosley Crowther): In short, what we have in this rendition of Dickens' sometimes misunderstood Carol is an accurate comprehension of the agony of a shabby soul. And this is presented not only in the tortured aspects of Mr. Sim but in the phantasmagoric creation of a somber and chilly atmosphere."

The look of of the whole thing, including the attempt to animate the original illustrations, is a bit school play-ish: it has none of the visual elan of the Lean adaptations. I watched it in the colorized version, unaware that it was a BW film, and then watched a little in B&W. It should be watched in B&W.

There have been at least 21 screen adaptations of ACC, starting in 1901, variously featuring Albert Finney, Bill Murray, George C Scott and Reginald Owen amongst those playing the lead.



COLDITZ STORY, THE

1955 A 3.75 7.1 GB2

Hamilton, Guy

Gordon Dines

John Mills, Eric Portman, Richard
Wattis, Ian Carmichael, Lionel
Jeffries

WW2. Based on Peter Reid's book which recounts the attempts of Allied prisoners to escape from the Colditz Castle prison camp in Germany. Eric Portman is the senior British officer and John Mills is in charge of escape attempts initiated by British, French, Dutch and Polish POWs. Portman makes rather more of his role than does Mills who is by no means bad. The camp commandant is quite benign, all things considered, and life in the camp is more like a Spartan boarding school. The brutal and malign aspect of the war doesn't get much of a look-in; much of the film is humorous and taken up with various hi-jinx.

The film is about 3/4 *Boys Own* and 1/4 serious war drama. Quite neatly done but it's not gonna keep you awake late at night, either because you've discharged too much adrenaline or because you are pondering the moral complexities of war. I saw this film with my dad when I was about twelve and thought it was absolutely spiffing.



COURIER, THE

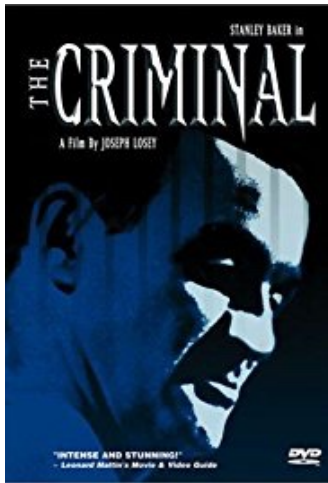
2020 PT 3.50 7.3 GB

Cooke, Dominic

Sean Bobbitt

Benedict Cumberbatch, Merab
Ninidze, Rachel Brosnahan,
Angus Wright, Jessie Buckley

High-gloss espionage thriller loosely based on the early 1960s Penkovsky case and focusing on Greville Wynne, the courier between Moscow and London. Lavishly produced, well acted, intermittently interesting ... but falling well short of the better exemplars of the genre. The narrative trajectory is altogether predictable as are the various tropes and motifs which you've seen a hundred times before. The first two-thirds of the film plod along but things eventually ramp up even if the means of generating tension are a bit flashy, contrived and cliched. The Georgian actor, Merab Ninidze as Penkovsky, is the best of the players. Overall it's earnest, worthy, stolid, lacking in any real charge. Nor does it illuminate Cold War espionage in any important respect. I wanted to like it more than I did. It's most obvious predecessor is Spielberg's **Bridge of Spies**.



CRIMINAL, THE

1960 Th 4.00 7.0 GB2

Losey, Joseph

Robert Krasker

Stanley Baker, Sam Wannamaker, Patrick Magee, Patrick Wymark, Nigel Green, Margit Saad,

Losey's jagged and unsettling film about crime, prison and the underworld in 60s UK. Superbly shot by Robert Krasker, strong performances, especially from Baker and Magee, and tautly directed. It's pretty strong medicine after the polite police procedurals which were so rife at the time. It's nervy, edgy, almost hysterical, and captures the nastiness of the underworld and prison culture. (But you know what? The prisoners wear ties!)The plot is rudimentary, but that's not a big problem. The party scene is embarrassing. And how many more Johnny Dankworth soundtracks do we have to sit through? Did Patrick Magee ever play Mr Normal?

Baker was a Welsh actor, producer and close friend of Richard Burton. He died of lung cancer in 1976 at the age of 48. Shortly before his death he said, *I have no regrets. I've had a fantastic life; no one has had a more fantastic life than I have. From the beginning I have been surrounded by love. I'm the son of a Welsh miner and I was born into love, married into love and spent my life in love.*

aka: **The Concrete Jungle**



CRUEL SEA, THE

1953 A 4.50 7.6 GB2

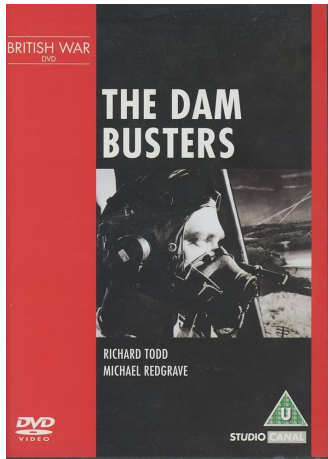
Frend, Charles

Gordon Dines

Jack Hawkins, Donald Sinden,
Virginia McKenna, Denholm Eliot,
Stanley Baker

2015: *Cruel Sea, Cruel War.* Adapted from Nicholas Monsarrat's best-selling novel about corvette escorts in the North Atlantic, based largely on his own experiences as a Lt. Commander in WW2. Shot in semi-documentary style, capturing the grey grimness of the Atlantic war. Jack Hawkins and Donald Sinden manage more than frightfully British stiff upper lips (though there's plenty of that as well), conveying something of the psychological strain of this kind of warfare. The narrative trajectory of the film and the character types are predictable but the whole thing is well done. Not much overt flag-waving. The scene concerning the death of the seamen's sister is one of the best in the film, understated but moving. Too long: the first half is a bit sluggish. Doesn't generate the tension or the moral complexity of the best war films (eg. **Das Boot, King and Country, Paths of Glory**) but still one of the better films in the combat genre. Producer Balcon had to borrow a corvette from the Greek navy as there were none left in service. Frend's other successful film was **Scott of the Antarctic**. Denholm Eliot and Virginia McKenna were married at the time (divorced a few years later). Hawkins' best screen performance? He died of throat cancer in 1973, aged 62. Sinden was a popular screen actor in the 50s but went on to a solid stage career. He couldn't swim and nearly drowned during filming of **TCS**, rescued by Hawkins.

2021: No, it's better than I previously allowed. Smartly scripted by Eric Ambler, very efficiently directed, professionally acted. The best of Ealing's non-comedies? Probably.



DAM BUSTERS, THE

1955 A 3.75 7.4 GB2

Anderson, Michael

Erwin Hillier

Richard Todd, Michael Redgrave,
Derek Farr, Raymond Huntley,
John Fraser

Based on Paul Brickhill's book of the same name and Guy Gibson's *Enemy Coast Ahead*, **DB** tells the story of the invention of the "bouncing bomb" and its use against the great dams of the Ruhr Valley in 1942. Not a bad story – and true as well! A few nice shots on the English airfields, some graphic aerial photography, and Michael Redgrave is almost always worth watching, as he is here. But overall a film which is now somewhat dated. It's utterly devoid of any moral complexity and it only boasts one vaguely interesting character (Barnes Wallis, played by Redgrave) – otherwise its pretty much a standard 1950s *Boys' Own* number. Not the worst air force movie I've seen ... but a long way from the best! "Nigger" – just the shot for a black dog eh? It's pretty slow and about 10 minutes too long. Was the most popular British film of 1955; not surprising really. I read Brickhill and Gibson's books in my early teens and found them quite enthralling. Gibson died in 1944 when his plane crashed in the Netherlands after a bombing raid. Anderson directed about thirty films, none of them very distinguished. (He does have his admirers.)(2014)

2021: Better than I thought, the observations above notwithstanding. It's really a film about a concerted team effort in which the individuals don't much matter apart from Barnes Wallis. The film also deserves some credit for not cluttering up the narrative with pointless sub-plots and romances. Upgraded from 3.5 to 3.75.



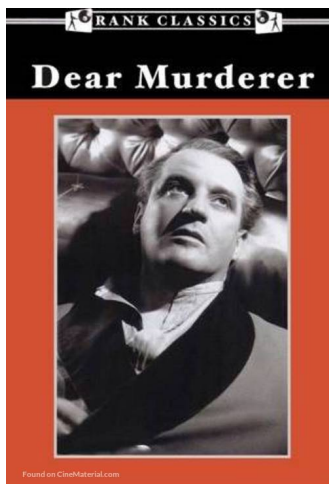
DAY OUT, A

1972 D 4.00 7.6 GB

Frears, Stephen

David Waller, James Cossins,
John Normington, Philippe Locke

1910. A group of industrial workers in the north of England go on a day's bicycle outing. A closely-observed, low-key "slice of life" with fragments of conversation, accidents, cricket and sex. Some echoes of the kitchen-sinkers and almost Jacques Tati-like in places. Nicely put together. A very effective epilogue. It's all over in 48 minutes. The players include a few familiar faces from the British theatre & TV comedy/drama shows of the period. An early outing for director Stephen Frears and writer Alan Bennett.



DEAR MURDERER

1947 Th 3.75 6.9 GB

Crabtree, Arthur

Stephen Dade

Eric Portman, Jack Warner, Greta Gynt, Dennis Price, Maxwell Reed

This is one of those ingeniously plotted drawing room mysteries which were so popular in England in the first half of the 20thC. Business man (a very urbane Eric Portman) returns from an overseas trip to discover his wife has been naughty during his absence. He devises a cunning scheme of murder which will look like suicide. But various developments intervene which require a rapid readjustment of his plans. A stolid inspector (Warner), smarter than he seems (that's the way with policemen in this film sub-genre!) is on the trail. Based – pretty obviously – on a stage play but nicely done; brisk and entertaining with a literate script and well crafted performances all round. There are better exemplars of the type but this provides 90 enjoyable couch-minutes.



DENIAL

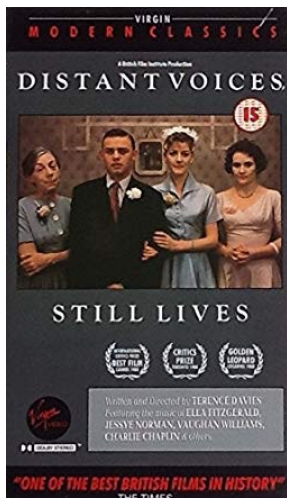
2016 D 3.50 6.7 GB

Jackson, Mick

Haris Zambarloukos

Rachel Weisz, Tom Wilkinson,
Timothy Spall, Andrew Scott,
John Sessions

Holocaust denier David Irving brings a defamation suit against young American scholar who has accused him of deliberate dishonesty and distortion in his claims exculpating Hitler and denying the Holocaust. So, a kind of legal thriller which, on the face of it, had a lot going for it: a script by the very well-credentialed David Hare, based on Deborah Lipstad's book; a highly dramatic and volatile story; reasonably impressive cast. What could director Mick Jackson do with all this? Well, as it turns out, a good deal less than one might have hoped. The performers do pretty well (Spall being much the most interesting as Irving while Weisz brings a bit of zing to her role) and the film deserves some credit for not de-humanizing Irving and for not making the defence team too heroic or sympathetic. But Jackson is not up to making the most of the weighty material, and falls for some pretty shop-worn moves (Boadicea? — well, OK I suppose ... but something a little more subtle?). Like most Holocaust-related films this one is quite inadequate to its subject. An honest try but no more. Disappointing really.



DISTANT VOICES, STILL L

1988 D 4.75 7.5 GB

Davies, Terence

William Diver

Freda Dowie, Peter
Postlethwaite, Angela Walsh,
Dean Williams, Lorraine
Ashbourne, Debi Jones

Pain redeemed by poetry. Growing up working-class in 1940s-50s Liverpool: booze, singing, soccer, the radio, the movies, church, unhappy families, drudgery, frustration, stoicism, social ritual, accidents, moments of joy and tenderness, birth, marriage, death, all overshadowed by domestic violence. (The only missing element is school life which gets a fair look-in in Davies' **The Long Day Closes**.) A collage of tableau episodes, memories, reveries, threaded together by music and singing... with the threat of violence always lurking in the shadows. Sepia tones, a stealthy but graceful camera, a poignant musical track which alternates between popular culture and other more elevated but out-of-reach possibilities. Clearly it is largely autobiographical and achieves a magical mixture of social grit/neorealist authenticity and cinematic poetry. The characters are utterly believable as is the whole social milieu; Freda Dowie as the long-suffering, worn-out but indomitable mother and Debi Jones as Micky, the good-time girl who understands all, are respectively quietly and noisily superb. The fragmented story of the family is sad, compelling, touching... and a powerful antidote to the many sentimental portrayals of British working class life. Andrew Pulver (*The Guardian*) was not far off the mark when suggested that **DVSL** was *arguably the high point of postwar British art cinema*. Davies has now made at least four films of very considerable distinction: **Distant Voices, The Long Day Closes, Time and The City** and **The House of Mirth**. (*Sunset Song* was of a lesser order while **The Deep Blue Sea** was vacuous and pretentious.)



DIVIDED HEART, THE

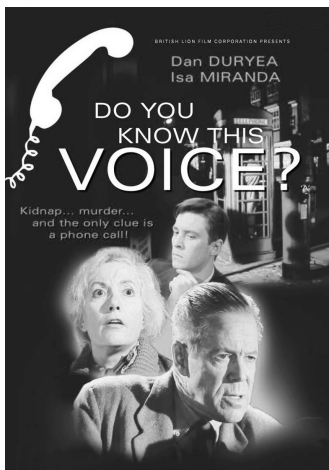
1954 D 3.75 7.0 GB

Crichton, Charles

Otto Heller

Cornell Borchers, Yvonne Mitchell, Armin Dahlen, Alexander Knox, Geoffrey Keen, Michel Ray

Young German couple have adopted an orphan at the end of WW2. Turns out, some years later, that the mother is alive and living in Slovenia. She wants her son back. The case goes to an international tribunal. A story which elicits shifting sympathies and poses some moral predicaments. Cornell Borchers and Armin Dahlen do a nice job as the adopting parents, Yvonne Mitchell as the mother. The officials and judges include the ubiquitous Geoffrey Keen who gives his pipe a fair work-out, Alexander Knox and Liam Redmond. Ferdy Mayne (of **Fearless Vampire Killers** fame) makes a brief appearance. The film is a fair specimen of Crichton's better work (**Hunted, The Titfield Thunderbolt, The Battle of the Sexes**): well-crafted, low key, informed by a humane sensibility. From the Ealing Studio. Crichton's two most successful films were **The Lavender Hill Mob** and **A Fish Called Wanda**.



DO YOU KNOW THIS VOICE?

1964 Th 3.25 7.3 GB2

Nesbitt, Frank

Arthur Lavis

Dan Duryea, Isa Miranda, Gwen
Watford, Alan Edwards, Peter
Madden

Our Man Dan is a charming nutter who's on the prowl. His main quarry is a nice, middle-aged Italian woman. And there's a very English cop on his trail. Where will it all end? A quirky little British B-Noir which is intermittently very good but has some bad moments. A fair score and neatly shot. But Dan is the main attraction. It does serve up some real tension — indispensable in the genre. Nice print.

Doesn't assume much intelligence on the part of the viewer — eg. the way it telegraphs the poisoned glass, the fate of the poor pussy cat, etc. And the relationship between Dan and wife lurches from one improbable scene to the next. A bit of sharpening up of the script and some more subtle direction and this could have been pretty good. As it is it's just another B-noir somewhat elevated by Duryea.



DON'T LOOK NOW

1973 D 3.75 7.3 GB

Roeg, Nicholas

Anthony Richmond

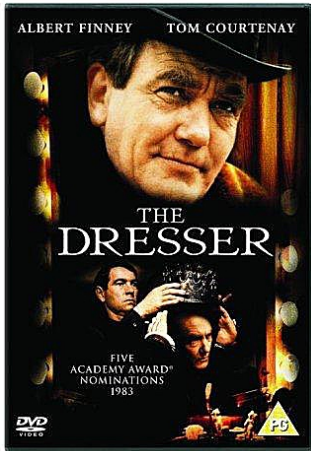
Donald Sutherland, Julie Christie,
Hilary Mason

One of the more durable and impressive of the early 70s arthouse-Hollywood cross-overs. An intriguing and inventive mix of drama, romance, mystery, “psychic thriller” and horror, anchored by fine performances by Sutherland and Christie, and achieving a certain élan through Roeg’s brilliant direction, cinematography and editing, and the splendid use of Venice as an atmospheric locale full of mystery, beauty, decay and menace. Filled with powerful, enigmatic images and with an intensifying feeling of dread. Sometimes the film, like so many of its kind, strives just a little too hard to be “arty”.

The widely-celebrated sex scene did nothing for me apart from generating some mild interest in Roeg’s cross-cutting. There was a lot of speculation about the sex scene being “for real”: it wasn’t.

As usual with Daphne du Maurier material, we wonder what it all adds up to... and suspect that’s it’s not much once you remove the atmospherics — but, hey, I’ve got nothing against atmospherics! Perhaps its strongest aspect of the film’s thematics is as a meditation on grief.

1970s film seem to date more than they should. Why is this? I wonder why Roeg’s career went down the toilet after three uneven but arresting films — **Walkabout**, **Performance**, **Don’t Look Now**?



DRESSER, THE

1983 D 3.50 7.7 GB

Yates, Peter

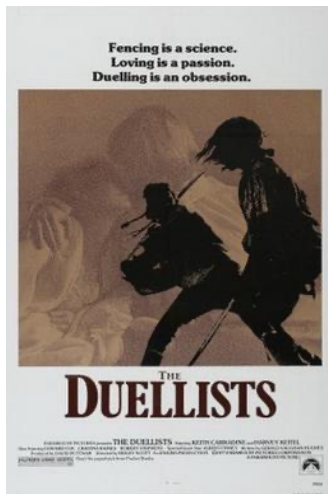
Kelvin Pike

Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay,
Edward Fox, Eileen Atkins,
Michael Gough

War-time England. Finney plays an ageing Shakespearean actor who is almost over the hill but gives one last hurrah. Courtenay is his faithful and badly treated dresser. A film about the theatre, celebrity, ego; an adaptation of Ronald Harwood's play in which the protagonist was loosely based on Donald Wolfit. Finney and Courtenay are both a bit over the top and the whole thing has an unpleasant odour.

I saw this in 1983 at a drive-in — must've been just about my final trip to the drive-in! I was impressed. (It was nominated for five Oscars that year — didn't win any but was one of the year's successes.) Now it strikes me as a slightly putrid play/film which was symptomatic of a certain malaise and moral decay in English society. It's competently made and well-acted for sure ... but I can't see that it has that much going for it.

Peter Yates had a chequered career: **Robbery**, **Friends of Eddie Coyle**, **Bullit**, and **Breaking Away** as well as a lot of duds. (**Eddie Coyle** is easily the best of them.)



DUELLISTS, THE

1977 D 3.50 7.4 GB

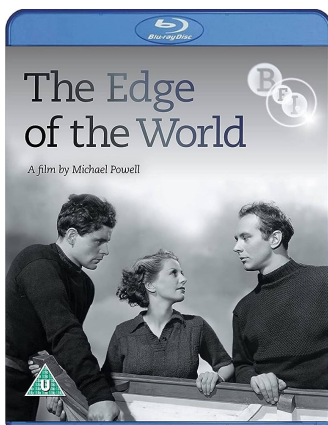
Scott, Ridley

Frank Tidy

Keith Carradine, Harvey Keitel,
Diana Quick, Albert Finney,
Edward Fox

Taken from Joseph Conrad's story about a series of duels, over many years (late 1790s to 1816), by two French officers in the Napoleonic army. The poster gives you the general drift: *Fencing is a science. Loving is a passion. Duelling is an obsession.*

I was apprehensive about this film: I haven't the slightest interest in duelling/fencing; I generally dislike costume dramas; neither Carradine nor Keitel are among my favoured players; the handful of Ridley Scott films I've seen have not excited me despite his obvious talents. However, **The Duellists**, Scott's first feature, turned out to be a better watch than I had feared. Here are the credits: a moderately interesting narrative set against a meticulously mounted historical background; accomplished film-making evident in the flow of imagery, lighting, editing and so on; a generally pleasing score. But then again, how much time does one want to spend watching a couple of not very interesting fellows toggged up in ridiculous outfits and sporting braids and curled moustaches, engaging in an interminable series of preposterous duels, the whole thing interlaced with equally uninteresting romantic entanglements?



EDGE OF THE WORLD, THE

1937 D 5.00 7.4 GB

Powell, Michael

Monty Berman et al

Eric Berry, Belle Chrystall, Finlay
Currie, Niall MacGinnis, John
Laurie

A haunting and poetic paean to the disappearing way of life of crofters on the remote and harsh Shetlands island of St Kilda (actually transposed to Foula). A simple but affecting story unfolds through a series of elemental episodes. Astonishing visuals, superb editing, haunting music and soundtrack. A combination of **Man of Aran** style ethnographic-doco and a beautifully rendered human drama leavened with quiet humour, though the dominant note is elegiac. Finlay Currie (James Gray, Andrew's father) is splendid, as he was as Magwitch in **Great Expectations**.

This is a landmark film in every sense of the word and should be far better known. Quite amazing that it was Powell's first major work. All credit to the BFI for its fine restoration and preservation of this magnificent film, cinematic art of the highest order. I find it very hard to think of a film I like and admire more. It's certainly my favourite British film, most days anyway

(Anyone interested in the Shetlands way of life and its melancholy fate should read Edwin Muir's *Autobiography*, J. Synge's *The Aran Islands*, and *The Hills are Lonely* by Lillian Beckwith.)



EIGHT O'CLOCK WALK

1953 Th 3.75 6.8 GB2

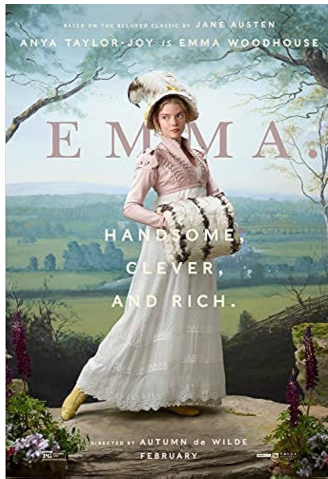
Comfort, Lance

Brendan Stafford

Richard Attenborough, Derek
Farr, Ian Hunter, Cathy
O'Donnell, Maurice Denham

“Wrong Man” story about a taxi driver who is in the wrong place at the wrong time, arrested because of very damaging circumstantial evidence. How is he to get out of this fix? Crime-investigation-trial structure. Like quite a number of British films of the period it's a modest but well-organized crime film which is intelligently scripted, well acted (especially Attenborough & Farr) and nicely shot, textured with small observations about English life. Excellent print.

The screenplay, particularly the denouement, is a bit rickety, and the story never really develops much intensity (one only need compare it to the *locus classicus*, the Hitchcock masterpiece, **The Wrong Man**). Cathy O'Donnell is a bit on the saccharine side. And for goodness sake, what is this nonsense about the defence lawyer not speaking to the accused?



EMMA

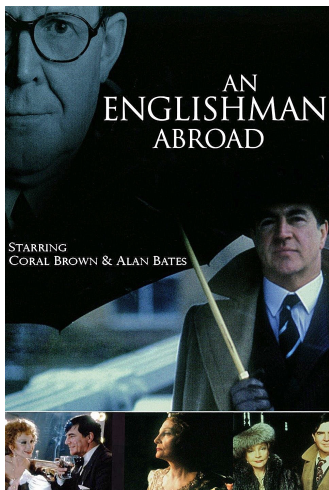
2020 D 3.75 6.7 GB

De Wilde, Autumn

Christopher Blauvelt

Anna Taylor-Joy, Johnny Flynn,
Josh O'Connor, Mia Goth, Bill
Nighy

Jane Austen's much loved classic about the feisty, match-making young Emma Woodhouse is brought to the screen yet again in a polished, picturesque and poised outing which ends up being a little dull. The DVD cover tells me that it is "hilarious, delicious, absolutely stunning, romantic", full of "glittering satire". Well no, not really. No doubt it is well made, finely acted and visually seductive but it's also highly conventional — a play-safe movie. The satire, which might have redeemed the rather indulgent treatment of the social milieu (the rural gentry living on the spoils of empire and riding on the back of the common people), is almost non-existent and when it does rear its head here and there is it usually both facile and tame. It's also a film without any depth of feeling — all surface. There are a few moments of emotional intensity but they are fleeting. The film offers enough to make for pleasant entertainment but no more than that. Mia Goth and Johnny Flynn are the best of the performers. Screenplay by NZ writer Eleanor Catton whose thriller, *Birnam Wood*, I enjoyed



ENGLISHMAN ABROAD, AN

1983 PT 4.25 7.8 GB2

Schlesinger, John

Coral Browne, Alan Bates,
Charles Dance

Alan Bennett's superb play/film about a 1958 Moscow encounter between the actress Coral Browne (played by herself) and the Englishman-in-exile/spy, Guy Burgess (Bates). It's an eminently suitable subject for Bennett's acerbic view of the Soviet Union, the subtleties and absurdities of "English-ness" and human foibles in general. It's very funny in parts but, as usual, also deeply sad, always humane. The scene near the end with Burgess' tailor ("Mum's the word") is almost as funny as the sequence with Blunt and the Queen in **A Question of Attribution** (a companion piece). Coral Browne and Alan Bates are both seriously good, especially the former. Bennett is an absolute master of irony, sly humour, and the telling observation, and manages to convey so much in just a word or two. Wonderful! Shot in Dundee — won't do anything for Dundee's tourist trade!

I'd be hard pressed to separate this and **A Question of Attribution** (both directed by Schlesinger) but I think this one wins by a sliver of Pears soap and a couple of Craven A's.



movieposterbargains on eBay

ENTERTAINER, THE

1960 D 3.50 7.1 GB

Richardson, Tony

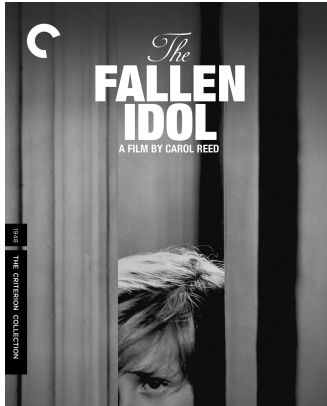
Oswald Morris

Laurence Olivier, Joan Plowright,
Brenda de Banzi, Roger Livesey,
Alan Bates, Albert Finney

Tony Richardson's film adaptation of John Osborne's play about a third-rate music-hall song-and-dance man in a tatty seaside town, on the way down; he's really a hollow, selfish man with a tremendously insouciant façade. The milieu is tacky (perfectly exemplified in the beauty contest) and the story sad. The film deals with three parallel declines — national, theatrical, personal. Despite a lot of outdoor location shooting it still looks and sounds like a stage play. It has its moments... but the whole thing is a bit too theatrical (in the not so good sense) and never develops much emotional traction despite Plowright's best efforts. The acting is good; the fault is in the script and to some extent in the direction.

Olivier here reprises his stage role which had been a tremendous success. Joan Plowright married Olivier (who was divorcing Vivien Leigh) soon after making this film. Screen debut for Alan Bates and Albert Finney, the latter doing rather better. Tony Richardson only had a short run as a director of any distinction — and that because he rode the wave of kitchen sink social realism: **Look Back in Anger** (59), **The Entertainer** (60), **A Taste of Honey** (61), **The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner** (62) — of which the last was the most impressive and **The Entertainer** the least. Apart from this group he made a lot of mediocre or positively bad films of which the very worst was probably **Ned Kelly** (70) (with Mick Jagger for goodness sake!) which scores the lowest rating I've ever seen on IMDB: 4.9.

All in all this is quite an interesting film with some powerful moments... but it doesn't quite come off.



FALLEN IDOL, THE

1948 Th 4.50 7.8 GB2

Reed, Carol

George Perinal

Ralph Richardson, Bobby
Henry, Michèle Morgan, Sonia
Dresdel

London. Story concerns an illicit affair, an accident which looks like murder, many well-intentioned but corrosive lies, a child's relationship with several adults. Innocence violated – in this case, inadvertently. Script by Graham Greene from his own short story; captures his moral landscape perfectly. Accomplished direction of some subtlety, wit and visual invention; Richardson nicely understated and Bobby Henry as the boy is pretty good; the ambiguities of “seeing”, enhanced by Perinal's exquisite cinematography. As one critic nicely observed, “Through a Child's Eye Darkly”. Elegant sets by Vincent Korda. Main problem: the “emergency exit” ending; attempted humour in police station falls flat; Michèle Morgan no more than adequate while Sonia Dresdel is altogether convincing. The police detectives (Denis O'Dea, Jack Hawkins, Bernard Lee and Geoffrey Keene) are splendid, all so English! Pity there weren't more Greene-Reed collaborations, of which there were three: **Third Man**, **Our Man in Havana** and this, all quite different and each distinguished in its own way. Other impressive child-centered British films of this ilk: **Oliver Twist**, **The Innocents**, **Tiger Bay**, **Whistle Down the Wind**, **Kes**. Some classics on the violation of childhood innocence: **Germany Year Zero**, **Shoeshine**, **The Postmaster**, **Mouchette**, **400 Blows**, **The Young One**, **Au Revoir les Enfants**, **Ivan's Childhood**, **Spirit of the Beehive**, **El Sur**. Yet others: **The Last Ride**, **The Window**, **Night of the Hunter**, **Cria Cuervos**, **Our Mother's House**, **The White Ribbon**, **Twenty Four Eyes**, **What Maisie Knew** ... and many others! a very fertile field.



FATHER, THE

2020 D 4.00 8.3 GB

Zeller, Florian

Ben Smithard

Olivia Colman, Anthony Hopkins,
Olivia Williams, Imogen Poots,
Rufus Sewell

Anthony (Hopkins) is a crotchety old fella sliding into dementia, Anne (Colman) his loving, anxious and put-upon daughter. Anne is trying to arrange a live-in carer but the situation is becoming increasingly fraught as the father declines. Abrupt time-and-space confusions, distortions and dislocations drag the viewer into Anthony's disordered state of mind. The story plays out largely in Anne's apartment. Adapted for the screen from Zeller's own play.

Zeller's clever direction and Hopkins' turbo-charged performance have won plenty of plaudits but I was most affected by Olivia Colman's beautifully controlled portrayal of the inner struggles of the daughter. The story is harrowing and disquieting. Minor gripe: I wasn't really convinced by the narrative contrivances centering on the other two men. (Zeller being a little too clever for his own good?) The mental/psychic perils, indignities and disturbances of old age seem to have loomed much larger in mainstream cinema of the last fifteen or twenty years — no bad thing; **Iris, Still Mine, Away from Her, Amour, Nebraska...**

Somewhere I saw this film described as a "black comedy". Really? It has a few funny moments but it can't by any stretch be described as a comedy, black or otherwise. Where do they dredge up some of these so-called critics?

How often does one see, in the same week, two films whose directors' names start with Z (Zeller and Zhao — **Nomadland**)?



FILM STARS DON'T DIE IN

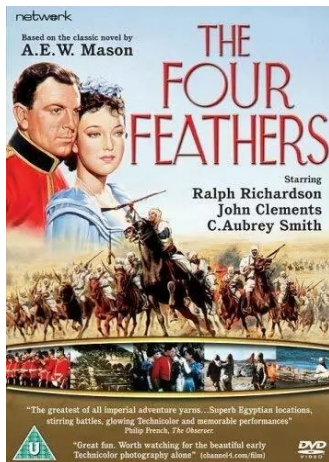
2017 M 3.75 6.7 GB

McGuigan, Paul

Annette Bening, Jamie Bell,
Kenneth Cranham, Julie Walters,
Vanessa Redgrave

“Kitchen sink meets Hollywood glamour”, as one critic neatly put it. When I first heard about this film — Gloria Grahame in Liverpool in her last days and in a bittersweet relationship with a much younger man — I thought, “this one I’ll pass on, thanks all the same”: the possibilities for tackiness and/or slush seemed more or less unlimited. Some good reviews and personal reports changed my thinking; I’m glad they did. This is a fine film which manages to keep several balls in the air: the love affair, handled with some delicacy but without dousing the fire, so to speak; the depiction of Joe’s ordinary but loving family; the dreamworld of Hollywood stardom; the evocation of place and period. It has qualities I wasn’t expecting: restraint, warmth, sensitivity, tenderness, compassion. The story is based on a memoir by GG’s young lover, Pete Turner (nicely played by Jamie Bell). (Turner appears in the film as “Jack” — no idea who that is!) Annette Bening gives another exquisite performance. I’ve seen GG on screen a lot; Benning gets into her skin!

Many of the American on-line reviews (as distinct from those in the Oz papers and the British sites) are rather tepid, unfairly so I thought, and a few quite spiteful. But Chuck Bowen has some point, writing in *Slant* (one of the superior cine sites, though sometimes the reviewers are too clever and too “cutting edge” for their own good — and ours): “The film shows no interest in the inner workings of a relationship that’s defined by unusual circumstances.” (Compare it with **In a Lonely Place** and the criticism takes on added force.) Still, all in all a pretty good flick and way better than I was initially expecting.



FOUR FEATHERS

1939 A 3.75 7.6 GB2

Korda, Zoltan

Georges Perinal

John Clements, Ralph
Richardson, C. Aubrey Smith,
June Duprez

English soldier from an old military family resigns his commission and thereby “disgraces” the family name and attracts the scorn of his fellow officers, three of whom send him white feathers as tokens of his cowardice. They go off to serve under Kitchener in Sudan, fighting those devilish dervishes while he stays at home to endure the disapproval of his new wife ... things move on from there. It’s 1939 Technicolor Spectacle, Britain’s answer, in some sense, to **Gone with the Wind**. A thumping Imperial Adventure with plenty of sabre-rattling, flag-waving, stiff upper lips, crazed “fuzzy-wuzzies”, demented Arabs and the like. It’s handsomely mounted, lavish and spectacular, both the successor and predecessor of a slew of such tales brought to the screen; **The Charge of the Light Brigade, Lives of a Bengal Lancer, Gunga Din, Zulu, Khartoum, Northwest Frontier, The Man Who Would Be King, Guns at Batasi** amongst others. The personal drama of the coward making good and the love triangle give the story plenty of interest and the acting is uniformly good with C. Aubrey Smith stealing the show as the blustering military dinosaur reliving the “glories” of the Crimean War. There’s just enough subversion of the dominant imperial theme to give the thing a bit of salt ... though it’s unfortunate that Harry’s initial motivation for resigning his commission seems to die an early death. From AEW Mason’s best-selling novel which has been adapted for the screen at least five times; this is almost certainly the best. Alexander Korda produced, Vincent Korda did the set designs and Miklós Rózsa scored it.



FRANCHISE AFFAIR, THE

1951 Th 3.75 7.1 GB

Huntington, Lawrence

Günther Krampf

Michael Denison, Dulcie Gray,
Anthony Nicholls, Marjorie
Fielding, Athene Seyler, Ann
Stephens

Marion and her mother live alone in a secluded country house, the Franchise. A teenage girl accuses them of kidnapping her with the intention of making her a domestic slave. The village turns against the two women. They recruit the help of a local solicitor. A brisk thriller, redolent of the British cinema of the period: modest in scope and budget, a tidy plot, well-acted with crisp dialogue and some understated humour. Michael Denison is very appealing as a certain type of English gent and Marjorie Fielding gives a sprightly performance as Mrs. Sharpe, as does Athene as Aunt Lin. All in all, very enjoyable.

I read all of Josephine Tey's detective stories at school; many feature Inspector Grant much more prominently. Tey's best known work is *Daughter of Time* (1951) in which Inspector Grant, bed-ridden in hospital, probes the mystery of Richard III. Her *A Shilling for Candles* (1936) provided the basis of the plot for Hitchcock's **Young and Innocent** (1937). *The Franchise Affair* (1948) is based on a real-life case from the 18thC.



FRENZY

1972 Th 3.75 7.5 GB2

Hitchcock, Alfred

Gil Taylor

Jon Finch, Barry Foster, Alec McGowen, Vivien Merchant, Anna Massey, Barbara Leigh-Hunt

London, early 70s. Serial killer is on the loose in Covent Garden area. It's a "Wrong Man" story, sharply scripted by Anthony Shaffer and with the usual Hitchcock ingredients. Jon Finch is a conspicuously unsympathetic protagonist while Barry Foster is altogether convincing as the psychopath. Has plenty of Hitch's characteristic flourishes, moves along smartly and does build some tension. Vincent Canby described it as *like a roller coaster in total darkness*. The depiction of London, and the Covent Garden area particularly, is deft. Alec McGowen (as the police inspector) and Vivien Merchant (his wife) provide some very funny scenes revolving around food.

Hitch's declining creative trajectory was certainly not uniform; *Frenzy* came after the dreadful *Topaz* and *Torn Curtain*, and is certainly far better than either. It was Hitch's penultimate film, followed only by *Family Plot*. It's lurid, sour and cynical ... so what's new? On my Hitchcock chart this comes 23rd out of 26 — shows what a genius H was! (The three below it are *Spellbound*, *Topaz* and *Torn Curtain*. No doubt it is better than some of the lesser Hitchcock works I haven't seen, such as *Jamaica Inn* and *Family Plot*.)

When compared with Hitch's master works of the 50s and early 60s *Frenzy* illustrates changing cinematic conventions and a certain coarsening of Hitch's output; it is both verbally and visually much more explicit in its treatment of sordid and lurid material. Does this make for a more powerful dramatic impact? The simple and obvious answer is no; it curtails the imagination, exploits rather than interrogates the viewer's voyeurism, and generates distaste rather than fear, shock, suspense etc.



FRONT PAGE STORY

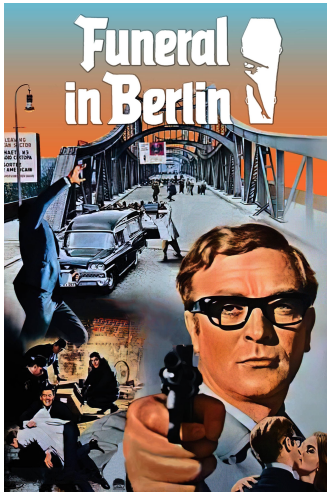
1953 D 3.50 6.8 GB

Parry, Gordon

Gilbert Taylor

Jack Hawkins, Derek Farr,
Elizabeth Allen, Michael
Goodliffe, Eva Bartok

JG, Our Man Jack, is a newspaper editor who's addicted to work, neglectful of his wife and forever chasing the "front page story" — "copy". The narrative spans a single busy day, as in **Gideon of Scotland Yard** (1958), John Ford's film (1958) about a very busy and harried police inspector on the job, again played by Hawkins. On JG's plate are stories about a woman on trial for the euthanasia killing of her husband, an atomic scientist who is sharing the secrets of the bomb with "a foreign power", some evicted and orphaned children, strikes, a plane crash ... you get the idea. There's an array of the types we usually find in newspaper movies: hardened, alcohol-pickled journos who've been on the job too long, cynical opportunists and climbers, idealists who want to keep their hands clean. And then too there's domestic drama of one sort and another. Jack does a lot of hustle and bustle. This is a patchy film, directed without any flair but, in the main, competently played. When director Parry tries a few tricks — the cross-cutting for example — one rather wishes he hadn't. Eva Bartok plays the woman on trial and does not speak. The story has some good moments and the newspaper milieu is well portrayed. Things come to a climax in a somewhat over-cooked scene in the newspaper office, a showdown between JG and one of his reporters who has just witnessed a death which he and a colleague have unwittingly caused. The domestic sub-plot is insipid. The whole thing is mildly entertaining but no one would reckon it to be compulsory viewing. From a novel by Robert Gaines. I like this period of British cinema and I like this kind of movie but I couldn't honestly recommend it beyond saying that I quite enjoyed it. Gordon Parry directed 18 altogether forgettable movies. One would not be surprised if this milk-and-water affair was the best of them.



FUNERAL IN BERLIN

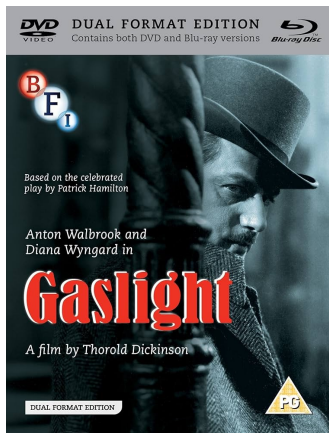
1966 PT 3.75 6.9 GB2

Hamilton, Guy

Michael Caine, Oscar Homulka,
Guy Doleman, Eva Renzi

Len Deighton's novel filmed by Guy Hamilton with Michael Caine reprising the Harry Palmer role from **The Ipcress File**; fortunately Guy Doleman (Ross) is on board again. Oscar Homulka gives a rambunctious performance as the would-be defector. Has some snappy lines and a couple of hilarious moments. Ross ordering Palmer to kill Vulcan is one of the funniest things I've seen in a long time! Has a very 60-ish feel and look (hard plastic). The plot stretches credulity but that's par for the genre.

Much better than the recently seen **The Quiller Memorandum** — better plot, better dialogue, better direction, better acting, much better use of the post-war Berlin locale. Whilst not distinguished in any way it's all good fun for espionage buffs like myself. This was the second in the Harry Palmer trilogy (**Ipcress File** and **Billion Dollar Brain** being the others).



GASLIGHT

1940 Th 3.75 7.4 GB2

Dickinson, Thorold

Anton Walboork, Diana Wyngard,
Jimmy Hanley, Robert Newton,
Cathleen Cordell

Original film version of the Patrick Hamilton play with Walbrook as the sinister husband and Wynward as his wife. Efficiently directed, well shot, splendidly acted with plenty of Victorian atmospherics.

The impact was somewhat vitiated by familiarity with the plot from the remake. Also difficult to compare as it is some time since I saw the MGM Boyer-Bergman version, directed by Cukor, done by MGM in 1944. MGM tried to destroy all prints of this film ... and nearly succeeded. Some critics claim this is the superior version...but I'm not convinced. Walbrook is more sinister, less charming than Boyer; Bergman played the role much closer to hysteria than does the comparatively restrained Diana Wyngard (married, for a time, to Carol Reed).



GATHERING STORM, THE

2002 D 3.75 7.6 GB

Loncraine, Richard

Albert Finney, Vanessa Redgrave, Linus Roach, Ronnie Barker, Jim Broadbent, Derek Jacobi, Lena Headey

An intertwining of Winston Churchill's public and private life in the years leading up to WW2. It's pretty much what you would expect of a Top Shelf HBO/BBC drama: a literate and well-structured script, high-gloss production values, a well credentialed caste, an intelligent if not very deep treatment of the material. What lifts it well above the run of TV dramas is the intrinsic interest of the story and a dazzling and sometimes quite touching performance by Albert Finney, splendidly supported, particularly by Vanessa R and Ronnie Barker. It has just enough historical and political grit to prevent it becoming sentimental mythologizing and makes it something more than a film to make the Brits feel good about themselves. (On the other hand it does somewhat ignore the more sinister aspects of the sympathy for the Nazis amongst significant portions of the British upper classes.) The story was first filmed in 1974 with Richard Burton and Virginia McKenna in the lead roles.



GET CARTER

1972 G 3.75 7.5 GB2

Hodges, Mike

Wolfgang Suchitskys

Michael Caine, Ian Hendry, Britt Eklund, Geraldine Moffat

London gangster (Caine) heads north to the seedy underworld of Newcastle to unravel his brother's murder. Lots of violence, some nudity and surprisingly little bad language. Neat plotting and visually quite impressive, evoking the grimy streetscapes and harbour of Newcastle, the moral squalor of the underworld and the sleazy social world of the hoods and their proletarian victims. It's a mix of gangster revenge, noir and kitchen sink. Caine is excellent as the cold, reptilian avenger/lone wolf. The generally awful characters (with clothes to match) are well played. Plenty of menace, action and tension. It's brutal, cynical and nihilistic. Camera work and editing is sometimes a bit tricky. (I think Hodges may have a mild case of the Antonionis.) Britt Eklund, as always, is dreadful in every possible way.

GC been a widely-celebrated film amongst cinephiles — eg. No 17 on the BFI Top Hundred British Films list. Looks less impressive now than it did then...but it still has some edge.



GIDEON OF SCOTLAND YARD

1958 D 3.75 6.5 GB

Ford, John

Freddie Young

Jack Hawkins, Anna Lee, Anna Massey, Cyril Cusack, Howard Marion-Crawford, Michael Trubshawe, Miles Malleon

A busy day in the life of Inspector George Gideon (Hawkins): a corrupt colleague, a rape, three murders, two bank robberies... and something fishy. Quite a day! No wonder Gideon is a bit irascible! Somewhere between a British police procedural and fragments of Hitchcock. Hawkins is in fine fettle and is well supported by the rest of the cast. Nicely shot in Technicolor by Freddie Young. Ford manages the English milieu surprisingly well. It's not Hitchcock — and it's not really Ford either, so best to dispense with the inevitable comparisons. Taken for what it is (mainly) — a modest, low-key police procedural — it's not at all bad. Based on a book by John Creasey (who also wrote as JJ Maric); read a lot of him in my boarding school days. He was one of my earliest schoolboy enthusiasms (along with the likes of Neville Shute, Ian Fleming, Nicholas Monsarrat, Eric Ambler and Zane Grey).

Aka: **Gideon's Day** (released in USA in severely edited form and in Black & White!)

Covers a lot of the same narrative ground as **Front Page Story** (1953, d. Gordon Parry), also featuring Hawkins.



GIFT HORSE

1952 A 3.75 6.3 GB

Bennett, Compton

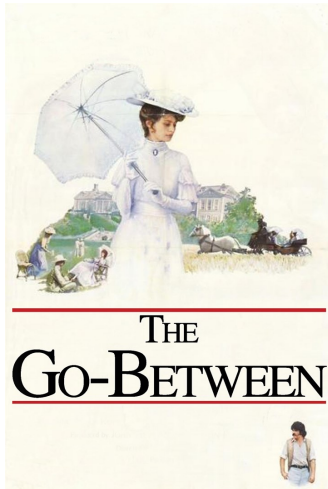
Harry Waxman

Trevor Howard, Bernard Lee,
Richard Attenborough, Sonny
Tufts, Hugh Williams, James
Donald, Dora Bryan

On the face of it this is a garden-variety post-war flag-waver about stiff upper lips aboard a dilapidated destroyer in the early days of WW2. Trevor Howard is the retired naval officer who's been in mothballs since being wrongly court-martialled, now put in charge of an old rust-bucket vessel on loan from the USA. He's a hard man and his crew take some time to come round. They have various mishaps before completing a dangerous mission. Loosely based on the raid on the St Nazaire docks, recounted in Lucas-Phillips' book **The Cockleshell Heroes**, filmed under the same name in 1955 and also starring Trevor Howard (the book actually followed the film). **GH** does follow a formula defined by a whole wave of earlier wartime naval dramas and the narrative trajectory is completely predictable. But I was impressed by the low-key approach, the attentive accumulation of detail, and the quiet but powerful performance by Howard. (Trev gives the pipe a fair old work-out.) Some viewers will find the first half a bit "slow". Apart from being very irritated by the character played by James Donald – I think he is meant to be a smooth charmer rather than a smarmy fop – I enjoyed this tidy and modest film quite a lot.

(**The Cruel Sea** is the gold standard in this particular sub-genre.)

Aka **Glory at Sea**



GO-BETWEEN, THE

1970 D 3.50 7.4 GB

Losey, Joseph

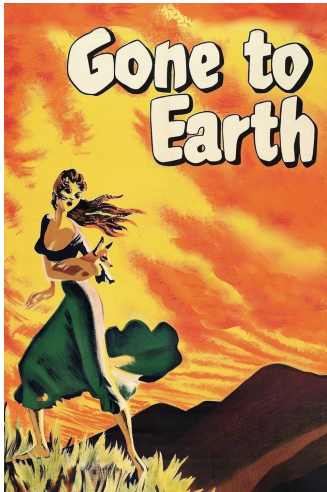
Gerry Fisher

Julie Christie, Alan Bates,
Michael Gough, Margaret
Leighton, Dominic Guard,
Edward Fox, Michael Redgrave

Country Estate, Norfolk, Edwardian England. This screen adaptation (by Harold Pinter) of LP Hartley's novel is told from the viewpoint of a young boy who is the go-between in an illicit affair between the beautiful young woman of the house (Christie) and the rough tenant farmer (Bates). A study in class barriers, repressed sexuality, coming-of-age, the loss/corruption of innocence and the ambiguities of memory. Camera work by Gerry Fisher. Period details are meticulous and the distinguished cast discharge their various duties quite well ... but the whole thing lacks spark. Disappointing really. (I enjoyed Edward Fox.)

I liked this when I saw it in 1970 but it now looks a bit like a mix of warmed over James Ivory-EM Forster crossed with DH Lawrence — not all that appetizing really. The symbolism is heavy-handed and the whole thing is mannered and ponderous. The English class system and its various hypocrisies are a pretty soft target.

This was the third and last of the vaunted collaborations between Losey and Pinter, following **The Servant** and **Accident**; to my mind (and eye), **The Servant**, unpleasant as it was, was their only entirely satisfying collaboration. **The Go-Between** win the Palm D'Or at Cannes. Well, fashions change!



GONE TO EARTH

1950 D 4.00 7.3 GB

Powell & Pressburger

Chris Challis

Jennifer Jones, David Farrer,
Cyril Cusack, Hugh Griffith, Sybil
Thorndike

Shropshire, 1890s. Pastoral Hardy-esque tale about a gypsy maid Hazel (Jones) who gets entangled with the local squire (Farrer) and the chapel minister (Cusack), and caught in the cross-currents of the old pagan ways, Christianity and Victorian social conventions (none of which are treated in a simplistic or polemical fashion). Hazel is nature-instinct-old ways; the squire is a selfish sensualist; the minister is spirit/goodness but bloodless, a little too high-minded for everybody's good; most of the villagers/congregation are convention (social and religious). Many of the usual Powell-Pressburger trademarks — location shooting and use of landscape; allusions to the fantastic, the surreal and the supernatural; deft characterization, humour, pathos. It's also in lush Technicolor. Hugh Griffith and Sybil Thorndike enjoy themselves in secondary roles.

At the time this was dismissed as “overblown”, “overwrought”, “melodramatic” etc and Jennifer Jones was given an absolute pasting by most critics. Its critical reputation has since been somewhat rehabilitated. Selznick butchered the film for American release and made a complete mess of it. (Selznick's atrocity was released as **The Wild Heart**.)

It's not top echelon Powell-Pressburger but it's impressive nonetheless.



GOOD DIE YOUNG, THE

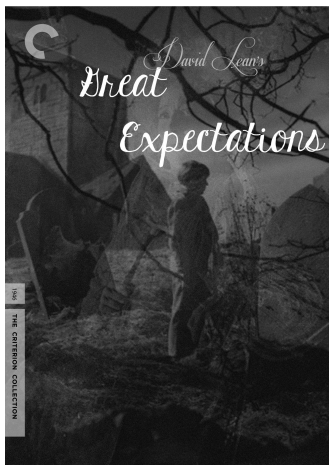
1954 D 3.50 6.8 GB

Gilbert, Lewis

Jack Asher

Richard Basehart, Laurence Harvey, Stanley Baker, Margaret Leighton, Joan Collins, Gloria Grahame, Robt Morley

Post-war London. Four very different men all imagine they have the same problem: they need money. Result: robbery. The trans-Atlantic ensemble cast does a fine job in this British crime thriller. Most of the film fills in the back-stories of the four men and their troublesome women — a broken down boxer (Baker), an out of work ex-GI (Basehart) with a beautiful wife (Collins) and a very unpleasant mother-in-law, an American air force officer (John Ireland) married to a runaround film star (Grahame) and a playboy (Harvey) whose wealthy wife (Leighton) is sick of handing over the folding stuff. Not a bad evening's entertainment but not much more. And just in case you've forgotten: crime don't pay! (One nice irony is that it is perfectly clear that money would have solved nothing anyway.) The first half of the film works well but the flashbacks go on for too long, the thing loses momentum, and then goes a bit silly. Lewis Gilbert was never better than a mediocre director and certainly never better than his material. This film had possibilities but LG is not up to it. Someone like Basil Dearden or Carol Reed might have made something better out of this. Whatever the film's deficiencies most of them can be sheeted home to LG; they are certainly not the fault of the players. Gilbert's lacklustre CV includes **The Sea Shall Not Have Them**, **Cast a Dark Shadow**, **Reach for the Sky**, **Carve Her Name with Pride** and **Sink the Bismarck!** In each case he had an OK (or better) story and a good (or better) cast but did little with them. (I'm won't mention his many turkeys except the exceptionally awful **Ferry to Hong Kong**.) I thought Basehart's wife was quite beautiful — only after the film was over did I discover she was none other than Joan Collins of all people! The title makes no sense: nobody is young, nobody is good. Go figure!



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

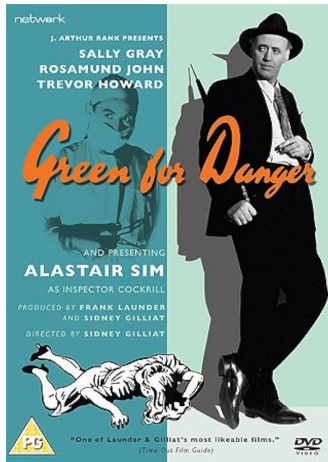
1946 D 4.75 8.0 GB

Lean, David

Guy Green

John Mills, Jean Simmons,
Valerie Hobson, Alec Guinness,
Bernard Miles, Francis Sullivan,
Finlay Currie

Engaging adaptation beautifully shot by Guy Green and with fine ensemble playing: Mills is perfectly adequate in the lead but is shaded by several of the supports, all of whom are excellent; 17-year old Jean Simmons (on debut) is perfect; Currie (Magwitch), Sullivan (Jaggers), Marita Hunt (Miss Havisham), Valerie Hobson (Estella) and Miles (Joe) The opening and closing chapters of the film are the most impressive; indeed, it never quite recaptures the visual flair and dramatic power of the unforgettable opening scenes. Magnificent sets. Everything is done most tastefully but without seriously dissipating Dickens' comic exuberance dramatic intensity and narrative drive, and without surrendering the gothic/horror elements. There is no reason to believe that John Mills, aged 38, could ever pass for a 20-year old — and he doesn't! Alec Guinness (aged 32) almost scrapes in. Dickens is a master storyteller, a profound moralist, an acute psychologist, a prescient social critic and a genius as a wordsmith; the film retains the story, the moral seriousness, the depth of characterisation (insofar as possible), some of the social commentary (seriously attenuated) — but a two-hour film cannot capture 600 pages of literary wizardry. But a fine attempt! Lean was first enchanted by the 1939 stage adaptation directed by Alec Guinness (who also played Herbert Pocket, as he does in the film, which was only his second). What a streak Lean had in the decade starting with **In Which We Serve** (42) and including **Brief Encounter** (45), **This Happy Breed** (47), **Great Expectations** (47) **The Passionate Friends** (49), **Madeleine** (50), **Oliver Twist** (51), amongst others.



GREEN FOR DANGER

1946 Th 3.75 7.6 GB2

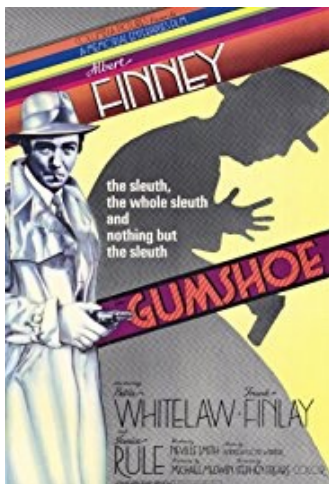
Gilliat, Sidney

Wilkie Cooper

Alastair Sim, Trevor Howard, Leo Genn, Sally Gray, Rosamund John, Judy Campbell

Implausible and eccentric thriller set in a wartime English hospital, elevated by some funny moments (mostly of dark coloration), some tension and the inimitable Alastair Sim as the police inspector. The old Agatha Christie ploy: a limited number of suspects all in the same room, put under pressure by the detective. Unfortunately, the inspector apart, the most promising character (Campbell/Bates) doesn't last the distance. Sim is a real treat. It's a bit weird, a bit wacky and quite entertaining. I enjoyed it a lot. The film ran into trouble with the censors over the portrayal of British military hospitals! (The censors apparently had little sense of humour; censors rarely do!) Did Leo Genn ever play anything but swarmy doctors (**The Snake Pit**)?

Gilliat co-wrote Hitch's **The Lady Vanishes**.



GUMSHOE

1971 N 3.75 6.5 GB2

Frears, Stephen

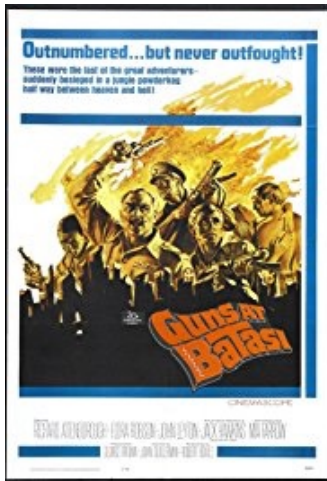
Chrus Menges

Albert Finney, Billie Whitelaw,
Frank Finlay, Janice Rule

Noir spoof/homage. The hard-boiled crime noir film transferred to contemporary Liverpool (early 70s) with Albert Finney as the PI. A lot of references to Hollywood classics. Like all good parodies it observes the conventions whilst at the same time sending them up. This film has the requirements of a good noir crime film: a strong sense of place and a closely observed urban milieu; an intricate and teasing plot; plenty of patter; an engaging protagonist. An affectionate tribute to the whole Hammett/Chandler lineage with Finney in sparkling form. He also produced.

The look of the film is a bit dated... but the fundamentals are unaffected. I saw this in 1971 in London and thought it was hilarious. It stands up pretty well but seems to have disappeared into a black hole; hardly anything written on it. Glad it has made it on to DVD.

Frears' first feature. He worked mainly in TV. He finally hit the big time with **My Beautiful Laundrette** (1985) and later **The Queen** (2005). I've seen neither. But I have seen **The Grifters** — and very much regretted it.



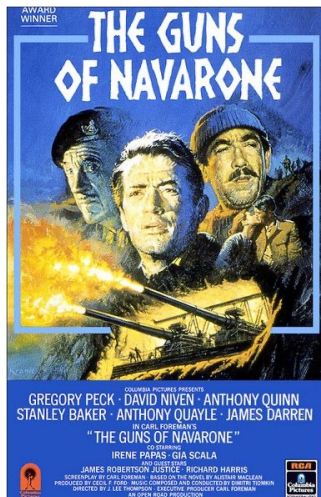
GUNS AT BATASI

1964 A 4.00 7.1 GB2

Guillermln, John

Richard Attenborough, John Leyton, Flora Robson, Mia Farrow, Jack Hawkins

Somewhere in Africa in the last days of the British Empire. Bunch of British soldiers holed up in the officer's mess after a nationalist coup has overthrown recently installed government. Richard Attenborough is the ramrod RSM who embodies the old values in a rapidly changing and volatile new world. Shot by Douglas Slocombe in gritty BW. The first three quarters are good but things go slightly awry in the closing stages. Some humour, some tension. John Leyton-Mia Farrow romantic sub-plot slowly goes absolutely nowhere. Treatment of political themes is fine as far as it goes — it's just not that far! Often compared with **Zulu**, most critics opining that **Zulu** is better. Not much in it: each has its merits. I think I like this better.



GUNS OF NAVARONE, THE

1961 A 3.75 7.6 GB2

Thompson, J Lee

Oswald Morris

Gregory Peck, David Niven,
Anthony Quinn, Irene Papas,
Anthony Quayle, Stanley Baker,
Gia Scala

Small British team faces impossible odds in destroying massive German gun placements atop a treacherous cliff in Greece. It has all the hallmarks of an Alistair Maclean war adventure: tensions in the team, an exotic woman, the good guys finding a way to get into Nazi uniforms, treachery and betrayal, superhuman prowess and ingenuity, and oh my goodness it's a terribly close thing. There's also the usual derisory nod in the direction of the moral quandaries raised by war. Thompson (of **Cape Fear** fame) knows how to ratchet up the tension and turns out one of the better exemplars of these essentially adolescent war adventures. Naming the hero Mallory was a bit much!

The cardboard sets in the final sequences are pretty clumsy. The actors are so true to their respective stereotypical personae that it sometimes inadvertently teeters on parody. Like almost every one of its type it's far too long (150m).

GN was a forerunner of a veritable floodtide of escapist war adventures in the 60s, all with stellar casts, big budgets, exotic locales and the same narrative formula: think **Great Escape**, **The Eagle Has Landed**, **Where Eagles Dare**, **The Heroes of Telemark**, **Von Ryan's Express**, **The Dirty Dozen**. I first saw this in 1961 (aged 14) and thought it was absolutely smashing!



HANDFUL OF DUST, A

1988 D 3.75 6.8 GB

Sturridge, Charles

Peter Hannan

Kristin Scott Thompson, James Wilby, Rupert Graves, Alec Guinness, Judui Dench

Old-school aristocratic squire wants a quiet life with his horses but has problems with his wife, his estate, his finances. His wife is on the fly with an empty pretty-boy social parasite in London. Things turn dark. Tasteful screen adaptation of Evelyn's Waugh's very fine novel about the spiritual malaise of the English upper classes in the thirties. It's about half way between the David Putnam spectacles (**Chariots of Fire**, **The Mission** etc) and the James Ivory Henry James/Edith Wharton adaptations — and does not entirely escape from the limitations of both. It doesn't quite capture all the ironies, witticisms and the bitter poignancy of the book — but not a bad attempt.

The Brazilian stanza might have been shortened by five or ten minutes. The film is too kind to Brenda. The Angelica Huston episode adds nothing whatever. The whole thing is a mite stolid and lacking the razor edge of the novel. James Fox would have made a good Tony. James Wilby is no more than adequate.

The story is partially informed by Waugh's own disastrous and painful first marriage. One of the odd things about Waugh is that (unlike Tony) he sees with the sharpest insight the hypocrisies, the snobbery, the moral vacuity of the class system and many of the old traditions — but he remains emotionally committed to them. In his personal life he became a kind of parody of the lost world which he so nostalgically celebrated in *Brideshead Revisited* (the wildly popular TV series was directed by the same Charles Sturridge which is no doubt why he got this gig).



HANGOVER SQUARE

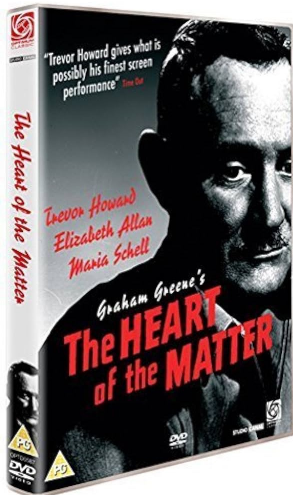
1945 M 3.50 7.4 GB

Brahm, John

Joe LaShelle

Laird Cregar, Linda Darnell,
George Sanders, Faye Marlowe

Edwardian London. Music, mayhem, murder and madness. Classical composer has black-outs and memory loss. He gets caught up with Naughty Girl Linda Darnell and neglects his serious composing. Pressures build. A not very convincing variation on the Jekyll and Hyde story with Laird Cregar as the man with a problem, Darnell as the catalyst for bad happenings, and George Sanders as a psychiatrist. The film mixes elements of the Edwardian mystery, theatrical melodrama and the horror genre. Not a bad try — and a fine effort by Cregar — but ultimately not very satisfying. Director Brahm, screenwriter Barre Lydon, Cregar and Sanders had teamed up the year before in the hugely successful murder melodrama, **The Lodger**. This was a follow-up with Bernard Hermann providing the score. Like many follow-ups, and by all accounts, it fell well short of its predecessor. Unhappily Cregar died of a heart attack before the film's release; he was only 28.



HEART OF THE MATTER

1954 D 3.75 7.0 GB

O'Ferrall, George More

Jack Hildyard

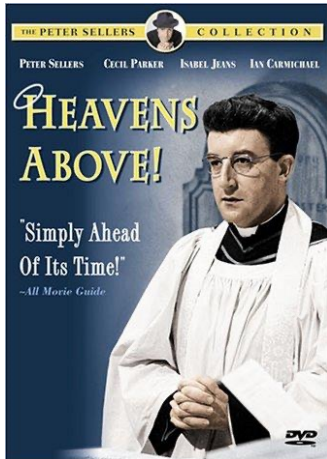
Trevor Howard, Maria Schell,
Denholm Eliot, Elizabeth Allan,
Peter Finch

Graham Greene's bleak novel about the conflicting demands of love, life and conscience is not an easy book to film but this largely succeeds — though it is very difficult to tell how I would have seen the film if I had not recently re-read the book. Of course the film is unable to catch the very fine-grained psychological and theological nuances of the book, and the whole lengthy sequence with which the book closes is here radically altered and telescoped into a few minutes of screen time. Howard and Schell are both first-class. Effective use of the Sierra Leone locale with a few striking images of the African people and with a soundtrack made up entirely of local music. Thoughtful and provocative adult fare. Apparently one of Howard's favourites amongst his many roles. Small role for a young Peter Finch who is not asked to do much.

What an extraordinary thing "Empire" was.

O'Ferrall spent most of an undistinguished career in television.

When I was about ten I was in love with Maria Schell.



HEAVENS ABOVE!

1963 C 3.75 6.8 GB

Boulting, John

Mutz Greenbaum

Peter Sellers, Cecil Parker, Eric Sykes, Isabel Jeans, Brock Peters, Ian Carmichael, Bernard Miles

Naive Anglican prison chaplain is accidentally appointed to a well-to-do parish In Orbiston Parva where his attempts to put the Gospel teachings into practice seem to meet with initial success but then things go wrong... It's an odd film, ostensibly a comedy but (a) it's not particularly funny though intermittently amusing (Peter Sellers plays it pretty straight), and (b) it has a deadly serious theme with some satirical bite. Sellers is very appealing as the gentle, sincere Rev John Smallwood whose acts of charity seriously upset the applecart — and the Tranqualax business as well! Boulting keeps things moving along and we meet a gallery of characters and types. Among others in the cast are Irene Handl, Malcolm Muggeridge, Miles Malleon, William Hartnell, Derek Nimmo: a roll-call of the British comic actors of the era from stage, TV and film! Malleon, Miles and Parker are the best of them. The silly outer space coda would best have never been conceived.

Some faint anticipations of Sellers' role as a "holy fool" in **Being There**. The only film comparison which comes readily to mind is Dwan's **Driftwood** — and the only real point of comparison is the similarity of the roles played by Sellers and the young Natalie Wood respectively. Both films have their own quiet charm.



HELL IS A CITY

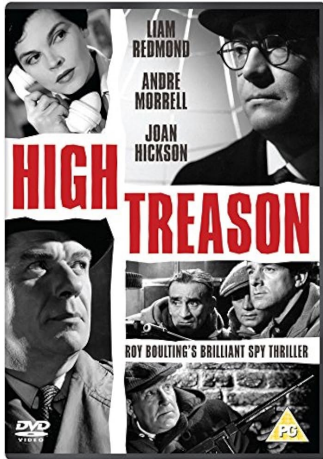
1960 Th 3.75 7.1 GB

Guest, Val

Arthur Grant

Stanley Baker, Billie Whitelaw,
Donald Pleasence, John
Crawford

Manchester. Grungy police procedural with hints of the kitchen-sinkers, from a novel by Maurice Proctor. Inspector Martineau (Baker) is tired, harassed, world-weary and out of sorts with his wife. Now he's dealing with an escaped con whom he helped put away. Banknotes marked with green powder, petty crims, a shady bookie and his over-heated wife, industrial slums ... The film is neatly put-together, avoids some of the usual clichés of the genre, presents a grim picture of the lower tiers of Manchester society and is well served by Baker's edgy performance. It seems to have no reputation whatsoever but it's a film with some claims on our attention. Great ending. The score is badly dated and the domestic sub-plot is an empty space but otherwise **Hell is a City** is one of the better police thrillers of the period.



HIGH TREASON

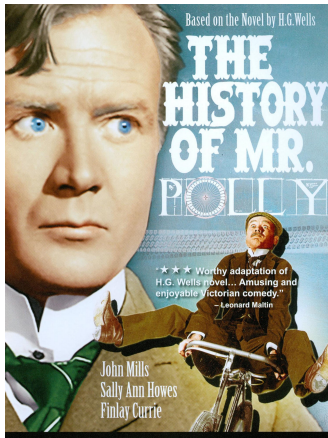
1951 Th 3.75 6.7 GB2

Boulting, Roy

Gilbert Taylor

Lian Redmond, André Morrell,
Joan Hickson, Mary Morris

London, 1950 (or thereabouts). A bunch of Commie rats are out to sabotage the British power supply—but the chaps at Scotland Yard are on the job. Quite a tidy little thriller even though the plot is rudimentary and there is more than a whiff of propaganda in the air. It's all frightfully English in rather a charming way. I enjoyed it hugely. Mary Morris (one of the Commies) is a looker whose part might have been further developed.



HISTORY OF MR POLLY, THE

1949 C 3.50 6.7 GB

Pelisser, Anthony

Desmond Dickinson

John Mills, Sally Ann Howes,
Betty Ann Davies, Finlay Currie,
Miles Malleison

Quiet, lazy, dreamy young man (Mills) uses his inheritance to buy a shop and marry — but neither enterprise works out well! Years later, after an absurd “suicide attempt”, he takes to the countryside on his bicycle. At the Potwell Inn he meets the pleasant proprietor and her daughter — but Uncle Jim is a dark cloud on the horizon...

Based on HG Wells’ comic novel, this is a lightweight piece of whimsy which works moderately well. (A week later I had trouble remembering it.)



HIT, THE

1984 G 3.75 7.0 GB

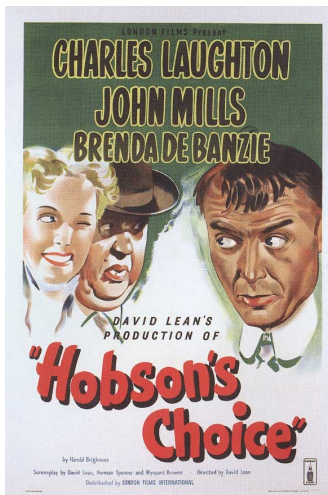
Frears, Stephen

Mike Molloy

Terence Stamp, John Hurt, Bill Hunter, Tim Roth, Laura del Sol, Fernando Rey

After grassing on his partners in crime Willie Parker (Stamp) is granted immunity and scarpers to Spain. Ten years later the bad guys are coming after him... John Hurt and Tim Roth play the hoodlums charged with getting Willie to Paris where he has an appointment with the old gang leader. Kidnappings, murder, and four characters on a long road trip through the arid Spanish landscape. Things don't quite go to plan.

Writer Peter Prince and director Frears turn a routine gangster revenge story into something more layered, more interesting, quite stylized and stylish. But it must be said that the existential philosophizing never rises above *Reader's Digest* level. At times it's quite funny, especially the Bill Hunter sequence. Score by Paco de Lucia and the credits music by Eric Clapton.



HOBSON'S CHOICE

1953 C 4.25 7.7 GB

Lean, David

Jack Hildyard

John Mills, Brenda de Banzie,
Charles Laughton, Prunella
Scales, Richard Wattis

Hobson (Laughton) is a selfish, complacent and tyrannical father of three daughters and the owner of a shoe-making business in an industrial Lancashire town; Will Mossop (Mills) is an apparently dopey “boot-hand” but a leather-working genius; the eldest daughter (de Banzie), consigned to spinsterhood by her father but the only real business head in the family, sees the main chance... **Hobson's Choice** is perfect specimen of a certain sort of British comedy/drama; a literate and amusing script with some satirical undertones; sharply etched characters; a closely-observed social milieu; predominantly in a comic key but laced with social observations and insights. And it's all splendidly acted, neatly structured and beautifully shot by Jack Hildyard. Lean keeps a firm but gentle hand on the reins. Charles Laughton and John Mills turn in impressive performances but it's Brenda de Banzie who deserves the bouquets. A pity she made so few films; she absolutely nailed this role.

Hobson's Choice, though a very different film in many respects, put me in mind of Sirk's wonderful **Has Anybody Seen My Gal?** Both are gentle and tender but intelligent morality plays in which all the characters are treated with some respect and sympathy. Sirk's film is funnier ... but they are both highly accomplished and of a sort massively under-appreciated in the contemporary cinema. (Another film which comes to mind in this context is **Still Life**, more quirky but with some of the same qualities.) **HC's** reputation has probably suffered because it has been overshadowed by Lean's more immediately striking achievements — but this is not far behind; don't be deceived by its modesty!



HOLLY AND THE IVY, THE

1952 D 3.50 7.5 GB

O'Ferrall, George More

Ted Scaife

Ralph Richardson, Celia Johnson, Margaret Leighton, Denholm Elliott, John Gregson, Hugh Williams

Bitter-sweet drama about a Christmas reunion, the frustrations of a country parson, and family tensions and incomprehensions. The plot centres on the parson (Richardson) and the daughter (Johnson) who is torn between duty and love. But there's a small gallery of interesting characters, all of whom are nicely played. I was rather taken with the more agreeable of the two old aunts (played by Margaret Leighton). Somewhat darker fare than might have been expected from a film slated as a Christmas favourite in England. Celia Johnson was in mid-40s when she played this role — and looked it. Ralph Richardson was only four years older but make-up takes care of that problem. The film is well scripted but talky and not particularly cinematic. You'd have to have the proverbial heart of stone ...

Celia Johnson's sister married Ian Fleming. Celia's daughters got lucky: they now own the Fleming (James Bond) estate. Nice work if you can get it!

O'Ferrall did most of his work for TV. His other film of some interest is **The Heart of the Matter** (1953)



HOME AT SEVEN

1952 Th 3.75 7.1 GB2

Richardson, Ralph

Jack Hildyard

Ralph Richardson, Margaret
Leighton, Jack Hawkins,
Campbell Singer

Mild-mannered bank clerk loses his memory, goes missing for 24 hours. A man whom he disliked is murdered after a robbery at a club of which the clerk is treasurer. Did he, didn't he? Quite a neat little mystery with Ralph Richardson perfectly suited to the role. It's based, obviously, on a play (a big hit on the stage), and is nicely done. Margaret Leighton is excellent as the worried wife, Jack Hawkins as the friendly doctor and Campbell Singer as the detective. Richardson's direction is quite competent in this low-key thriller which had me guessing all the way to the denouement. It's all frightfully English — part of its charm. RR's only gig as a director.



HOPE AND GLORY

1987 D 3.50 7.4 GB

Boorman, John

Philippe Rousselet

Sarah Miles, Ian Bannen,
Sebastian Rice-Edwards, Sammi
Davis, Derrick O'Connor, David
Hayman

John Boorman's semi-autobiographical story of a north London family's experiences during WW2, told from the point of view of a nine year old boy for whom the war yields many thrills and adventures. A period piece, a coming-of-age tale, a war story with a difference, a document of life on the home front through the prism of memory, a nostalgic reverie.

A much more tender and humane film than Boorman's usual fare (**Point Blank**, **Deliverance**, **Excalibur**), nicely crafted, rich in details and with plenty of uplift. But somehow, for me, it lacked any real bite. The film has an enormous, somewhat inflated reputation. I quite enjoyed it — but a bit disappointing overall.

PS. No one can learn to bowl a googly that easily!



HOPE GAP

2019 D 3.75 6.7 GB

Nicholson, William

Anna Valdez Hanks

Annette Bening, Bill Nighy, Josh
O'Connor

South coast, England. Late middle-age couple are at cross purposes in the midst of a disintegrating marriage; a stolid, buttoned-up and slightly nerdy fella and his feisty, smart and irritating wife. Their son, a young adult, gets caught up in the crossfire. Literate, sometimes amusing and intermittently engaging story which is given some lift by Annette Bening. Perhaps just a little too tasteful, arty and D&M, especially in the last five minutes where the solemn and somewhat self-conscious treatment of the material threatens to produce sludge rather than the nuanced drama for which it is aiming. Still, one must these days be grateful for a low-key, thoughtful drama which is pitched at an adult audience. Despite a few annoying moments I enjoyed it. We already knew that Annette Bening is a fine actor. Her character is much the most interesting of the three principals. We never get much more than skin-deep with the other two. The scene with the solicitor is worth the price of admission. Drone shots are OK — but in moderation please!



HOUND OF THE B'VILLES

1959 H 3.75 7.0 GB2

Fisher, Terence

Jack Asher

Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee,
Andre Morell, Miles Malleon,
Marla Landi, Ewen Solon, John
Le Mesurier

One of the several screen versions of Conan Doyle's classic story about a family curse, Gothic ruins, a fiendish hound, and dark doings on Dartmoor with Holmes and Watson navigating their way through the mire. Plenty of atmospherics. After rather a tacky start this settles into a very satisfying drama with some horror garnishing. It's well-upholstered, nicely shot and competently acted. Less lurid, less camp than the typical Hammer fare. Enjoyed Miles Malleon's turn as the episcopal entomologist. One of the least convincing "Spanish" accents I've ever heard!



HOUSE OF MIRTH, THE

2000 D 5.00 7.1 GB

Davies, Terence

Remi Adefarasin

Gillian Anderson, Eric Stoltz, Dan Aykroyd, Eleanoir Bron, Anthony LaPaglia, Laura Linney

Terence Davies' elegant adaptation of Edith Wharton's magnificent and tragic novel; if Davies hasn't always been true to the exact letter of the novel he has certainly understood and preserved its spirit. The story concerns the fall of a young woman of no independent means, moving in high society circles in *fin-de-siècle* New York, who seems to have the world at her feet but who falls foul of the rigid mores of her social set. The force of the novel, and the film, depend on the moral and psychological ambiguities surrounding the heroine, Lily Bart (Anderson), and her friend Lawrence Selden (Stoltz). Davies has understood and dramatized these perfectly. Gillian Anderson, somewhat to my surprise, is a revelation, bringing both subtlety and intensity to a very complex role. Behind the charm and sophistication of NY society **The House of Mirth** quietly but powerfully skewers the hypocrisy, acquisitiveness, and malice of the fashionable rich, and exposes a social ethos in which marriage is, at it were, a continuation of business by other means. The film is beautifully directed. Of the many Henry James and Edith Wharton screen adaptations this is one of the very best, along with **The Heiress**, **The Age of Innocence** and **Wings of the Dove**. **The House of Mirth** has been filmed three times, as have **The Age of Innocence** and **The Turn of the Screw**.

Roger Ebert: *The movie will seem slow to some viewers, unless they are alert to the raging emotions, the cruel unfairness and the desperation that are masked by the measured and polite words of the characters.* Yep, OK Roger, but a bit lukewarm.



HUNTED

1952 Th 4.00 7.5 GB2

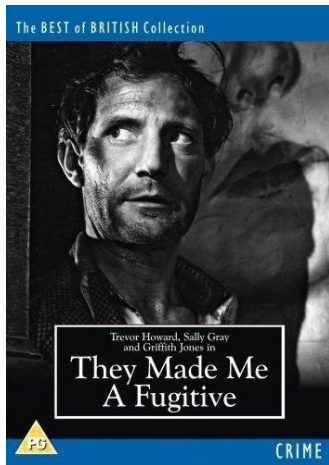
Crichton, Charles

Eric Cross

Dirk Bogarde, Geoffrey Keen,
Kay Walsh, Jonathan Whitely,
Elizabeth Sellars

Dirk B, on the run after committing a crime of passion, hooks up with a young boy escaping a cruel father. Set in a working class milieu in London, the industrial north, the countryside and a Scottish fishing village. Cross country flight. Nothing very surprising in the plot but the whole thing is handled well with some effective noirish cinematography. Good closing sequence in the fishing village. A small, modest, well-crafted film put together with some feeling. Seems to be more widely known as **The Stranger in Between**. Crichton is best-known for **The Lavender Hill Mob**.

Young Jonathan Whitely might have made a good Oliver Twist. He had roles in Fritz Lang's **Moonfleet** (55) and Val Guest's **The Weapon** (56). He eventually became an art curator at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. He died in 2020, aged 75.



I BECAME A CRIMINAL

1947 N 4.25 7.2 GB

Calvacanti, Alberto

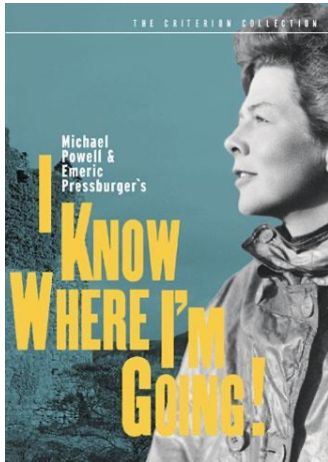
Otto Heller

Trevor Howard, Sally Gray,
Griffith Jones, Rene Ray, Jack
McNaughton, Beatrice Varley,
Maurice Denhman

Postwar London: Grunge City. Ex-RAF officer Clem Morgan (Howard) gets involved in a small-time black market racket but is framed for a murder. Jail. Escape. Complications with the Bad Guy's former girl. The cops are hunting Clem; Clem is hunting Narci (short for Narcissus!), the crime boss who betrayed him. Surprisingly good noir-thriller. Clem is an interesting protagonist, played by Howard with plenty of grit and some black humour, and DoP Heller makes stylish use of space and composition in the nocturnal city locales. (Heller's CV includes **The Divided Heart**, **The Ladykillers**, **Peeping Tom**, **Victim**, **Funeral in Berlin**). The sharp script (Noel Langley) is laced with good lines and macabre humour, and there's a colourful gallery of small-time hoods. Lively pace and narrative éclat. The storyline is predictable – but who cares? A superior specimen of under-rated British noir. I liked it a lot. Small quibble: the rooftop finale is a bit laboured.

Trev H was on quite a streak in the late 40s-early 50s: **The Way to the Stars**, **Brief Encounter**, **The Third Man**, **Outcast of the Island**, **The Heart of the Matter**, **The Gift Horse**. (Many of his later films were not up to scratch – rarely his fault.) Calvacanti had a short but distinguished spell as a film-maker before falling out with the studio bosses and fleeing to Brazil (the country of his birth). His other major work is **Went the Day Well?**

Original title: **They Made Me a Fugitive** (easily confused with **They Made Me a Criminal** (1939) another surprisingly good noir directed by Busby Berkeley with John Garfield).



I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING

1945 D 4.25 7.6 GB

Powell & Pressburger

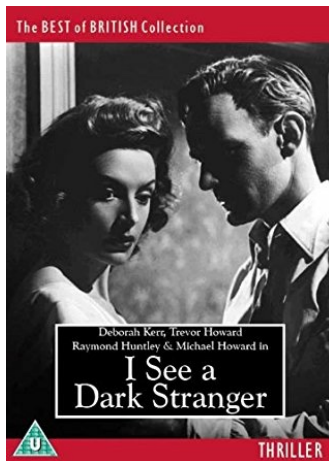
Erwin Hillier

Wendy Hiller, Roger Livesey,
Finlay Curries, Pamela Brown

Young woman in a hurry sets off from London to marry wealthy older man (an industrialist, significantly) in the outer Hebrides but inclement weather and a charming young naval officer throw her plans askew. Romance, comedy, drama, ethnography and a bit of myth and the supernatural thrown in. Nearly all filmed amidst the austere beauty of the islands and the ever-present sea; the boat in the storm sequence is gripping. A study of an old pre-industrial way of life and a meditation on contrasting values. The traditional Cìlidh is beautifully rendered. Hiller and Livesey are very engaging while Pamela Brown (Powell's love interest at the time) and Finlay Currie deliver delightful cameos. Altogether charming and very deftly done. Brought to mind **Man of Aran**, Lillian Beckwith's books about Hebridean life and Edwin Muir's wonderful *Autobiography*. Scripted by Pressburger and Powell: what a team!

Livesey couldn't leave London because of his theatrical commitments. All his outdoor on-location scenes are done with a stand-in. Remarkable! I wonder if Wendy Hiller ever turned in a poor performance (if so, I haven't seen it).

2020: Last seen in 2014. Even better this time around. A film which is continuously captivating, occasionally very funny and quite touching. It is also visually inventive and beautifully accented. Martin Scorsese was *overwhelmed by its illustration of love laced with mysticism*.



I SEE A DARK STRANGER

1946 PT 3.75 7.1 GB2

Laudner, Frank

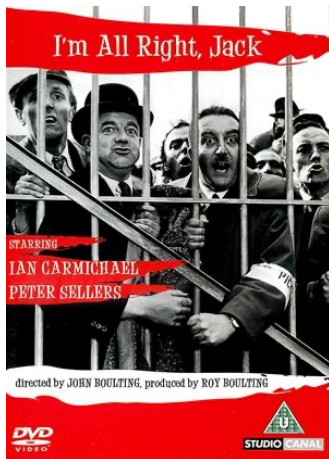
Wilkie Cooper

Deborah Kerr, Trevor Howard,
David Tomlinson, Garry Marsh

Wildly implausible but highly entertaining WW2 espionage comedy-drama with DK as would-be IRAS agent and TH as the British officer with a love/duty predicament. Whilst the story sometimes gets silly (the corpse in a wheelchair!) and the suspense is never more than tepid, the film is lifted out of the ruck by Kerr's charming performance and by some self-deprecating English humour (mainly through Garry Marsh as Capt. Goodhusband). Says something for the Poms that they could make this kind of film at that particular moment.

Obvious debts to **The Thirty-Nine Steps**, **The Lady Vanishes** and some common ground with Irish/Scottish comedy-dramas from Powell, Mackendrick and others. Gilliat (producer) and Laudner (director) wrote **The Lady Vanishes** ... but needless to say, Laudner is no Hitchcock.

A reminder of some of the many films (mostly very good, or better) in which Deborah Kerr appeared: **Colonel Blimp**, **Black Narcissus**, **From Here to Eternity**, **Heaven Knows**, **Mr Allison**, **An Affair to Remember**, **Bonjour Tristesse**, **Separate Tables**, **The Naked Edge**, **The Innocents**, **Night of the Iguana**. She was nominated for Best Actress six times but never won it. The best British screen actress of her generation?



I'M ALL RIGHT JACK

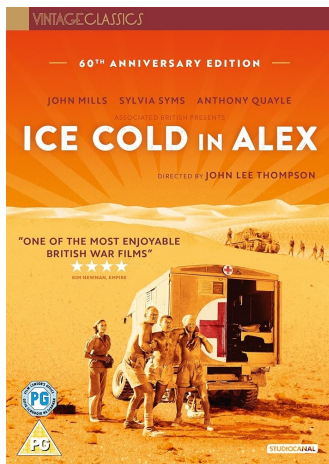
1959 C 3.75 7.3 GB

Bouting, John

Mutz Greenbaum

Peter Sellers, Terry Thomas, Ian Carmichael, Irene Handl, Dennis Price, Richard Attenborough, Margaret Rutherford

Trouble at the factory. Carmichael is the unwitting upperclass bumble who becomes a pawn in the hands of both the bosses (Price, Thomas and Attenborough) and the Works Committee, chaired by the redoubtable Frank Kite (Sellers). It's an infectious admixture of goofball farce, spoof, and satire which skewers all its targets (Stalinist unionists, lazy workers, greedy bosses, advertising, the media, the government, capitalism) while giving us plenty of laughs. The whole cast is in top form. Peter S gives a remarkable performance as the slightly bewildered would-be communist who half-realizes that something is missing in his life – a soul perhaps. I enjoyed Malcolm Muggeridge's in-character cameo. The story begins and ends in a nudist community. In a post-Thatcherite Britain the film's satire is now somewhat dated: the duplicitous arms dealing might be moved to centre stage if one were doing a remake! At the time the satire was not appreciated in some quarters. It's not altogether free of some of the prejudices of the era.



ICE COLD IN ALEX

1958 A 3.75 7.9 GB2

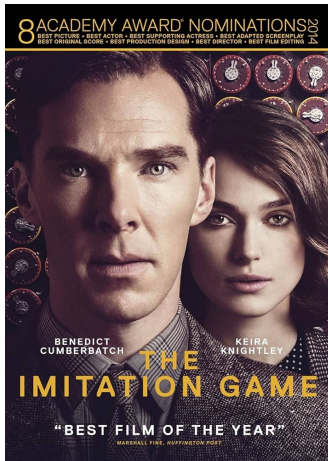
Thompson, J Lee

Gilbert Taylor

John Mills, Anthony QUayle,
Sylvia Sims, Harry Andrews

Madness in the desert. War zone, Libya 1942. Two English soldiers, a South African and two nurses cross the African desert in a beat-up old ambulance, making for Alexandria. Hazards abound. J Lee Thompson (**Cape Fear**, **Northwest Frontier**, **Tiger Bay**) manages to wring a fair bit of tension and suspense out of the threats from without and within. A couple of sequences are quite nerve-wracking. It's better than your average war-in-the-desert drama with an impressive performance from Mills, and some twists on the usual formula. It's carefully crafted by Thompson who is one of the better thriller/adventure directors — though he did make his fair share of duds. Various episodes recall **Sahara**, **Bitter Victory**, **Flight of the Phoenix**, **Five Roads to Cairo** and **The Wages of Fear**. Parts of the plot are just a teeny bit silly! Too long by about 20 minutes.

The film was re-titled "**Desert Attack**" and cut to 66 minutes for USA release; needless to say both the critics and the public found it a puzzling and unintelligible mess. What were they thinking??



IMITATION GAME, THE

2014 D 3.75 8.0 GB

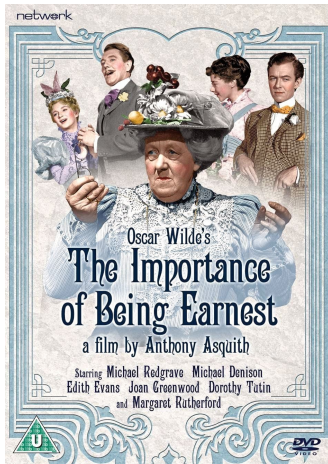
Tyldum, Morten

Oscar Faura

Benedict Cumberbatch, Keira Knightley, Charles Dance

Big-budget crowd-pleaser about Alan Turing, the invention of the “Turing Machine” and the breaking of the Enigma Code. Narrative is structured by the interweaving of Turing’s childhood, Bletchley Park and his arrest in 1951. It’s lavishly mounted, well-acted, occasionally very funny, and keeps the viewer engaged. Cumberbatch is compelling. All good. But it also purports to be a serious exploration of the nature of “genius”, artificial intelligence, identity, homosexuality and homophobia; on these fronts it doesn’t go very deep (which is not to say that it has nothing to offer). The introduction of a pseudo-Le Carré-ian espionage plot (entirely fictional) is also hackneyed and unconvincing. Still, all that said, it’s good entertainment, and it does powerfully makes its point about Turing’s ultimate fate even if the film’s affirmation of “difference” probably owes more to current cultural fashion than it does to any deep-seated intellectual or moral commitment. Keira Knightley does OK — but I find her very unsympathetic. Has she ever been in a really good film (if so, I haven’t seen it).

There are always a few of these well-made big budget, semi-serious, play-safe dramas around at this time of the year. Last year it was **Philomena** and a couple of years back **The King’s Speech** — all quite good but in the end not altogether satisfying. But, of course, a long way better than most of the best-selling drivel.



IMPORTANCE OF BEING E

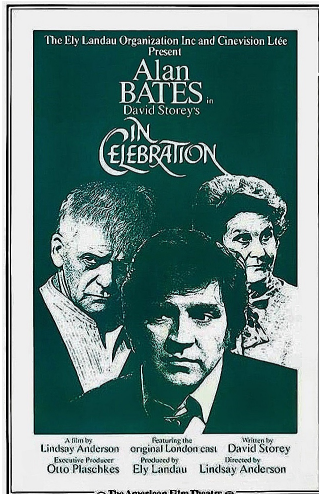
1952 C 4.75 7.6 GB

Asquith, Anthony

Desmond Dickinson

Michael Redgrave, Joan Greenwood, Michael Denison, Edith Evans, Dorothy Tutin

Oscar Wilde's witty and elegant piece of nonsense tastefully transferred to the screen with lush sets and costumes in beautiful Technicolor. Brilliantly cast and delivering impeccable performances all round; Redgrave and Greenwood are priceless. It will be a bit stagey and dated for some tastes but I can hardly imagine it being done better or in a more Wildean spirit. A mixture of wit and farce in the vein of **Arsenic and Old Lace**, **Charley's Aunt** and the like but vastly superior.



IN CELEBRATION

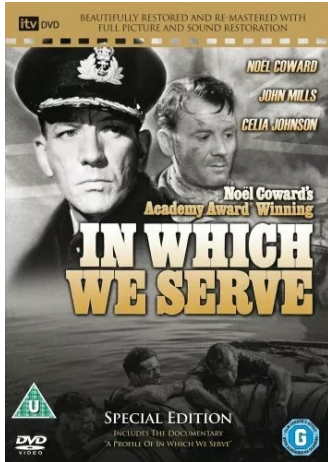
1975 D 3.75 7.1 GB

Anderson, Lindsay

Dick Bush

Alan Bates, Bill Owen, Constance Chapman, Gabrielle Day, James Bolam, Brian Cox

Long Journey Through a Hard Day's Night. One in the series "American Film Theatre", the purpose of which was (is?), in the words of one critic, to present "films that preserve the quality and excitement of superior theatrical performances of plays we might not otherwise be able to see" — thus the ethos of these productions remains, largely, theatrical and, so to say, archival, rather than cinematic. In this case the original production of David Storey's play was directed by Lindsay Anderson for the Royal Court Theatre of London, though not with this cast. It's a semi-autobiographical play about three sons returning home for a family celebration. Nearly all the action takes place within the cramped confines of a working class home in less than 24 hours: compact, concentrated, intense. The three brothers have each reacted to their upbringing and to various family troubles in very different ways. There is some humour of a somewhat painful kind but the dramatic development is relentless and quite harrowing. Imagine a mixture of Alan Bennett, Chekhov and Eugene O'Neill and you might get some idea of the kind of terrain covered. Most of the issues raised are left unresolved, more or less. High-calibre writing and stagecraft which is clever but self-effacing, and perhaps all the more effective for being so. The acting is, in the main, top shelf. (I had some trouble with Brian Cox as Steve; everyone else was altogether convincing.) I prefer **This Sporting Life** (also written by Storey and directed by Anderson) which transcends the theatrical limits so evident here, but this is a fine specimen of the English kitchen-sinker. David Storey was from a working-class background and came a little later than the first wave of "angry young men" but, for my money, was the best of them. He wrote several fine novels (including the scandalously neglected Saville) and many plays. He aspired to being an artist in his younger days and played rugby league for Leeds.



IN WHICH WE SERVE

1943 A 4.00 7.3 GB2

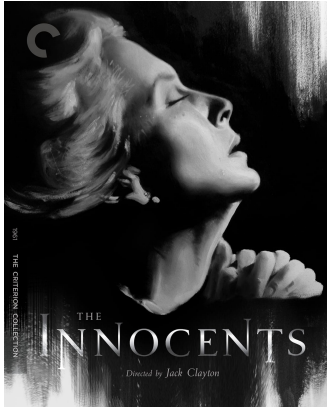
Lean, David & N Coward

Ronald Neame

Noel Coward, John Mills, Bernard Miles, Richard Attenborough, Joyce Carey

Wartime propaganda movie, with quasi-documentary effects, designed to rally the hearts and minds of all British folk good and true. One of the better flag-wavers — a thoughtful treatment of the material, and a film with many fine sequences, especially at sea. Coward gives a brisk, no-frills performance while Mills and Attenborough give signs of things to come. Celia Johnson is largely wasted except for her superb delivery of the double-edged toast while Coward's final speech is unexpectedly touching. Nicely shot by Ron Neame who later truned, with mixed results, to directing. His most impressive directorial effort was **Tunes of Glory** though some folk would go in to bat for **The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie**. Some of the working-class humour is a bit heavy-handed. The narrative drags in the middle. The children are a bit precious, as they so often are in British films of the period. A rather cosy view of class differences — apposite for the times perhaps but at this distance not altogether convincing. Loosely based on some of Louis Mountbatten's wartime experience.

Editor David Lean was roped in to help Coward direct: the rest is history. (Lean actually took over most aspects of direction.)



INNOCENTS, THE

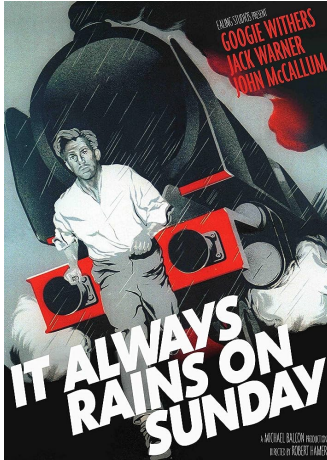
1961 D 4.25 7.9 GB

Clayton, Jack

Deborah Kerr, Michael Redgrave,
Meg Jenkins

Henry James story + William Archibald play + Truman Capote screenplay + Deborah Kerr + Jack Clayton as director + Freddie Francis as cinematographer = **The Innocents** = a very stylish and ambiguous spooker about the corruption of innocence, possession, and sexual repression. Ironic title: no one is innocent! Kerr is perfect as the very buttoned up (literally as well as metaphorically) governess. The children are Seriously Creepy. As usual Freddie Francis' camerawork is ravishing. Interesting to see that this is one of the earliest films to overcome the depth of field problems of Cinemascope. Magnificent sets (reminiscent of **Great Expectations**). One could argue that the film has it both ways — the ghosts are real (the teardrop on the desk, Miles' expulsion etc); the ghosts are the governesses' projections concerning the "secret, whispery and indecent thing". That's cheating! Or is this "creative ambiguity"? As a story the film sits somewhere between the Gothic horror story and the more explicitly Freudian psychological thriller. Not as scary as **Repulsion** (nothing is) but certainly disquieting. One of the best British films of the period. (Because it has a Victorian setting it hasn't dated in that obvious way.)

Exquisite print. Good commentary in the extras by Christopher Frayling (best known for his book on Sergio Leone). Jack Clayton should have a much more exalted reputation. He made at least four *seriously* good films: **Room at the Top** (59), **The Innocents** (61), **The Pumpkin Eater** (64) and **Our Mother's House** (67).



IT ALWAYS RAINS ON S

1947 D 4.50 7.4 GB

Hamer, Robert

Douglas Slocombe

Googie Withers, John Macallum,
Edward Chapman, Jack Warner

The first 60 minutes gives us a routine domestic drama against a closely-observed portrait of the East End in the rather grungy postwar period (it's always raining!). A gallery of types – the stolid policeman, spivs, petty crims, nightclub habitués, barflies, dart games, street kids – all nicely played. The last half hour suddenly ratchets up the action and the tension with a graphic chase sequence through the streets and rail yards before finishing with a quiet and understated epilogue which extols the virtues of the ordinary decent Englishman (a recurrent type in this period; the dull husband in **Brief Encounter** is an exemplar) whilst also accenting the death of passion marked by Rose's loss of Tommy and marriage to George. Noirish cinematography by Douglas Slocombe; he shot several of the best Ealing films as well as quite a few big hits in later years (the Indiana Jones films included, for what that's worth). A precursor of the full-blown kitchen-sinkers of the late '50s and then countless British TV dramas. Doesn't have the charm, wit and polish of Hamer's **Kind Hearts and Coronets** but pretty impressive nonetheless, and one of the best of the Ealing films. Hamer, as we know, came to an unhappy end. **Later postscript:** No, it's better than that. Very tight, beautifully paced, superbly shot by Slocombe, and with a fully realized story about Rose's lost dreams and limited horizons. Googie Withers' performance is much better than I had thought, as is the sympathetic but sharp-eyed depiction of the social milieu. Not just a forerunner of the kitchen-sinkers of later years but one of the best of its kind. That train over the bridge ... !



JOURNEY TOGETHER

1945 A 3.75 6.7 GB

Boulting, John

Harry Waxman

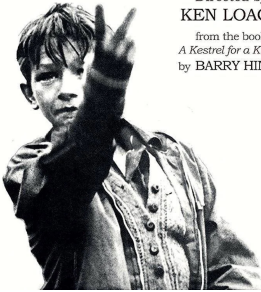
Richard Attenborough, David Tomlinson, Edward G Robinson, Jack Watling, John Justin

Fictionalized propaganda doco made almost entirely, during the war, by R.A.F. airmen, portraying the selection, training and combat duties of a group of young men. The first two thirds covers their training in Arizona, Canada and England before moving into the more high-octane bombing mission over Germany. A good deal of archival war footage is incorporated into the narrative, written by John Boulting and playwright Terence Rattigan, moving from the hi-jinx of young recruits into the grim realities of the war in the air. The film reminds us that many of the aircrew involved were hardly more than boys, and indeed, the first two-thirds of the film is somewhat reminiscent of larking about in a boy's boarding school. Edward G Robinson's role in the film is pretty well entirely superfluous; he was clearly introduced to give the thing some star power. (He performed without pay.) The opening segment of the film is a bit lame but things improve as the story develops some pace and heat. This was Attenborough's fourth feature film but he still looks like he wouldn't be familiar with a shaving razor.

“KES”



Directed by
KEN LOACH
from the book
A Kestrel for a Knave
by BARRY HINES



KES

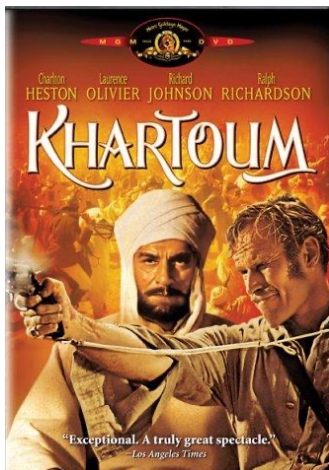
1969 D 4.75 7.9 GB

Loach, Ken

Chris Menges

David Bradley, Colin Welland,
Brian Glover

A touching, unsentimental story about a working-class youth (wonderfully well played by 14-year-old David Bradley) who finds some escape from his oppressive situation by training a kestrel hawk. The kestrel is a perfect symbol, not only because of the inherent symbolism of birds, but because, in this context, it is amenable to so many inflections and interpretations (freedom, spirit, transcendence, wildness, naturalness, authenticity – everything which is cramped and distorted and killed by the ugly social environment). Made in a grimly realistic style with a quasi-documentary feel, the film carries many acute observations about class, education, work, freedom and coming of age. Not as didactic or ideological as some of Loach’s other work and all the better for it. (The messages don’t need labouring and are embodied in the human drama.) A couple of very funny (but also depressing) scenes at the school. The merits of Loach’s film (and his *oeuvre* as a whole) spring from his commitments, his sincerity and his handling of actors; he is no great stylist. Welland is the only professional actor in the whole ensemble. Some of the colour has gone a bit muddy (not surprising in what was always a low-budget film with fairly Spartan production values). Stands up well nearly half a century later. Obvious antecedents in the “angry young men” of the late 50s and the “kitchen-sink” dramas. David Bradley went on to an intermittent acting career in film and theatre without ever reaching any great heights. He changed his name to Dai Bradley to avoid confusion with the other actor of the same name, became a follower of Krishnamurti’s teachings and worked as a carpenter. Briefly came back into public view when **Kes** was re-released on its 30 anniversary in 1999. If you’re interested in the real-life backstory check out Richard Hines’ book, *No Way but Gentleness*.



KHARTOUM

1966 A 3.50 6.9 GB2

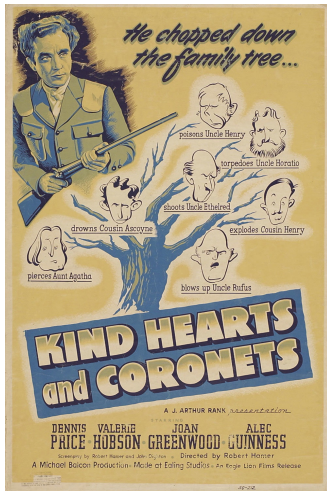
Dearden, Basil

Charlton Heston, Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, Richard Johnson, Nigel Green, Alexander Knox

Gordon's stand at Khartoum against the Mahdi, political shenanigans in London. Well-staged imperial/desert spectacle, a more or less accurate historical account, plenty of shots of the desert, the Nile and Khartoum. Olivier, Heston and Richardson all enjoy their roles (none of them all that taxing). It's a fascinating episode in imperial history; the film doesn't go very deep but it's not bad entertainment. The real question remains: who was the madder, the Mahdi or Gordon?

I daresay Larry Olivier was paid truckloads for not doing very much apart from an exotic accent and a lot of grim stares. Crowd scenes aside, the only woman who figures is a belly-dancer.

Nearly all the best British directors of the era were unable to resist the allure of the Big Budget Epic — Lean, **River Kwai**, **Lawrence of Arabia**, **Dr Zhivago**; Reed, **The Agony and the Ecstasy**; Attenborough, **A Bridge too Far**, Cy Endfield, **Zulu**. Michael Powell is one obvious exception.



KIND HEARTS AND Cs

1949 C 4.25 8.1 GB

Hamer, Robert

Douglas Slocombe

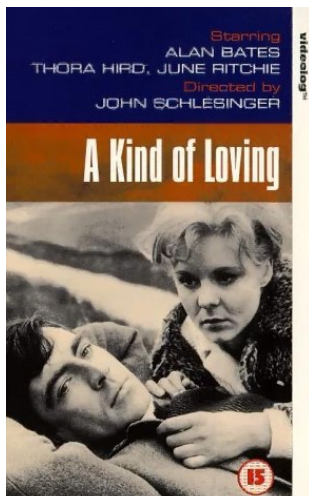
Alec Guinness, Dennis Price,
Valerie Hobson, Joan
Greenwood, Hugh Griffith

Perhaps the Ealing Comedy par excellence: clever, witty, mordant comedy of manners, a bit odd, quite cynical, and all wrapped up in a very shiny package. Amusing dialogue and brilliant use of the voice-over. An endless flow of satirical barbs aimed at the aristocracy, church, class attitudes and English manners. Dennis Price is price-less! Guinness does a great turn in his eight miniature roles, and the female leads are both excellent. The Edwardian ambience, with echoes of Oscar Wilde, is meticulously created: great sets, décor, costumes etc. The cinematography is pleasing and efficient rather than inspired. Someone aptly called the film “a model of silky malice” — eg. “It’s so difficult to make a neat job of killing people with whom one is not on friendly terms”. “Black Comedy” is not really my go although I can enjoy the better specimens such as this, **The Lady Killers** or **Arsenic and Old Lace** — and, of course, the greatest black comedy ever, **Dr Strangelove** (of rather a different kind).

The film is polished, elegant, inventive and entertaining, and it’s impressive — but I can’t imagine how it could come in at number 6 on the BFI list of 100 Best British films!

Must re-read Orwell’s essay on murder and entertainment.

Hamer was gay and alcoholic, and died at the age of about 50 from pneumonia. David Thomson: *Hamer's career now looks like the most serious miscarriage of talent in the postwar British cinema.*



KIND OF LOVING, A

1962 D 4.00 7.4 GB

Schlesinger, John

Denys Coop

Alan Bates, June Ritchie, Thora Hird, Bert Palmer

Lancashire industrial wasteland. A faltering relation between a young draughtsman and an office worker: one thing leads to another with the respective mothers running serious interference. Feels like real life. Nicely shot by Denys Coop (**This Sporting Life**, **Billy Liar**, **King and Country**) and unlike several of the kitchen-sinkers, has a musical soundtrack that has stood up pretty well (we are spared Johnny Dankworth this time!). Bates is very convincing (only his second serious screen role) and June Ritchie is just as good; a confused young couple subject to the constraints and pressures of the time — the contradictions and tensions of desire, love, responsibility and conformity. Although the story is centered on the Bates character the film's sympathies are complicated — although it has to be said that the two mothers get pretty rough treatment. Adapted from Stan Barstow's novel by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall (both worked on **Whistle Down the Wind** and **Billy Liar**). Schlesinger's direction in his first feature is thoughtful, sensitive, finely calibrated. Some critics found it "plodding", too episodic and a bit low on dramatic electricity; I didn't. I liked it a lot. It seems to have received much less critical attention than several other kitchen-sinkers. It's less grim, less violent, less abrasive than some — and not necessarily the worse for it!



KING AND COUNTRY

1964 A 5.00 7.6 GB2

Losey, Joseph

Denys Coop

Dirk Bogarde, Tom Courtenay,
Leo McKern, James Villers, Barry
Foster

WW1 trenches. Blood, mud, rotting flesh, rats, dead horses, barbed wire, foxholes, explosions, poison gas; fear, fatigue, brutality, psychological disintegration. Young, naive and not very bright soldier wanders off in a daze from the frontline to “get away from the guns”; he’s charged with desertion and court-martialled. Dirk B who is older, smarter and more sophisticated, is assigned to defend him. The squalor and horror of the trenches is graphically portrayed with additional use of photographs from the Imperial War Museum archives. Losey also inserts some intertitle-type stills, evoking the early cinema as well as the period more generally.

To use an over-exposed term, this is harrowing. It’s relentless, bleak, horrifying, acutely painful. The small doses of very black humour offer no relief. It’s a searing indictment of the militarist mentality which deems that a shell-shocked young man who has endured three years of nightmare should be shot to “keep up the morale of the troops”! The film also exposes the class stratifications in the army. Bogarde and Courtenay are both superb with the rest of the cast providing excellent support. The script is finely honed, intelligent, ironic, and Bogarde and Courtenay both deliver sensitively nuanced performances.

The penultimate scene of the soldier’s humiliation (drink, blindfold etc) is a bit overdone and cruel. Yes, young men can be traumatized and demoralized by war, and yes, they can behave in brutal and stupid fashion – but I still thought that in a film of some subtlety this was over the top. Some of the symbolism was also laboured (the rat in the cage and such). The film also retains something of its origins as a stage production. Much less baroque than most of Losey’s work in the 60s. It remains a savagely powerful film, a gruelling experience. Bogarde was largely responsible for getting this project up and running. All credit to him. The film was a critical success and a commercial flop. Is anyone surprised?

KING RAT

KING RAT

1965 A 4.00 7.6 GB2

Forbes, Bryan

Burnett Guffey

George Segal, James Fox, Tom Courtney, James Donald, John Mills, Denholm Elliott



A story about survival in a desperate situation; a rather grim, anti-heroic, relentlessly cynical treatment of its subject. Generally well acted and certainly well shot by Burnett Guffey. A useful antidote to American and British flag-wavers. Unlike most POW film this one has no interest in the captors or in escape attempts but only in the psychological and moral effects of harsh captivity. In this respect it shares some ground with Wilder's **Stalag 17** which had its own "king rat" (William Holden). The characters of Fox and Courtney aren't really fully worked out, though both are interesting. The film is powerful and impressive...but hard to really admire: its view of humanity is rather squalid. (Experiences like Changi sometimes bought out the best if more often the worst.) Based on a novel by James Clavell who was a prisoner in Changi himself. Changi was very much worse than the film portrays: a realistic film about Changi wouldn't be possible. Clavell also wrote the script for **The Great Escape** (a very different kind of war film). Paul Newman and Steve McQueen both turned down the lead role. Was this George Segal's finest hour?



KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOR

1937 A 3.75 6.8 GB2

Feyder, Jacques

Harry Stradling

Marlene Dietrich, Robert Donat,
Irene Vanburgh, Miles Malleison,
Peter Bull, Basil Gill

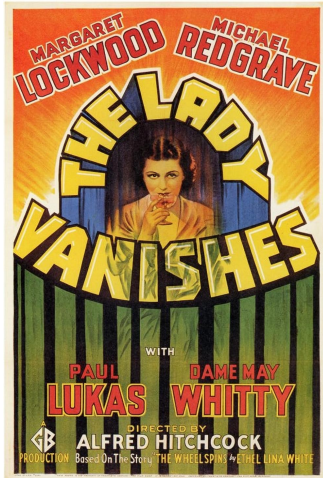
Russia: wartime/revolution/civil war. Robert Donat is a one-time translator now working as a British spy in wartime Russia; Marlene is an aristocratic countess; they are thrown together in the turmoil of WWI, the revolution and the civil war. From Siberia to Kazan, down the Volga to Hungary.

Lavish production by Alexander Korda who recruited Belgian director Jacques Feyder (a prolific silent-era director now largely forgotten) to put James Hilton's period thriller/romantic adventure onto the screen. Music by Miklós Rózsa with help from the ubiquitous Muir Matheson; cinematography by Harry Stradling with help from Jack Cardiff (some fine train scenes). (Marlene *always* get on a train, sooner or later, in this case both sooner and later!)

The story is rather weak beer but Donat and Dietrich give the thing some pep with echoes of the Sternberg films and there are some splendid crowd scenes capturing the tumultuous times. A lot of people get shot by both the Red and White Armies. (Last time I read up on the Civil War the death toll was estimated about 6 million. Trotsky said it was a small price to pay for the revolution.)

Donat was suffering badly from asthma which curtailed the rest of his career. Peter Bull (a drunken Red Commissar) was the Russian Ambassador in **Dr Strangelove**.

Soon after shooting King Vidor arrived in England to direct **The Citadel** with Donat; he used some of the sets from **Knight without Armor** as well as cameraman Harry Stradling whose credits include **Pygmalion**, **Suspicion**, **The Picture of Dorian Gray**, **A Streetcar Named Desire**, **Johnny Guitar** and **My Fair Lady**.



LADY VANISHES, THE

1938 Th 4.25 7.9 GB2

Hitchcock, Alfred

Jack Cox

Margaret Lockwood, Michael Redgrave, May Whitty, Nauntton Rayne, Basil Radford, Cecil Parker, Paul Lukas

Hitch at Play. A stylish, light-hearted and infectious train/espionage caper with all involved having a whale of a time. The satiric treatment of the political background and English attitudes provides the only darker tones. Some sparkling dialogue (script by Sidney Gilliat & Frank Launder) keeps the thing moving along briskly, and the two English chaps are delightfully obtuse. Hitch's mastery of *mise-en-scène*, studio shooting, pace, comedy, suspense and actors is on display ... but all done with the lightest of touches. The first half hour is quite entertaining but the thing doesn't really get moving until we're on board the train. Less cinematic pyrotechnics than some of his other early efforts (less ambitious but more polished than **The Thirty Nine Steps**). The most commercially successful of Hitch's British films, and one of the best. Redgrave's first film lead – how apparently effortless the whole thing is for him!



LADYKILLERS, THE

1955 C 4.75 7.7 GB

Mackendrick, Alexander

Otto Heller

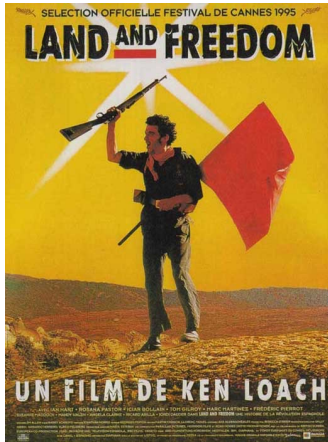
Alec Guinness, Kate Johnson,
Cecil Parker, Peter Sellers,
Herbert Lom, Danny Green

London. A motley crew of ageing wannabe bank robbers plan a heist in which an innocent old lady inadvertently plays her part. Kings Cross station and its hinterland provide the locale with most of the action taking place in Mrs Wilberforce's rickety house, peopled by General Gordon and other naughty birds.

One of the more subversive left-field Ealing Comedies with some very dark humour, noirish atmospherics and more than a touch of Gothic Macabre. It has to be counted one of the most distinguished of the Ealing cycle, along with **Kind Hearts and Coronets** which also had more than a little black comedy. For once Sellers is completely upstaged, this time by Guinness and Kate Johnson who earned her first and only major role in this film; she was into her 80s and died soon after. William Rose's script is razor-sharp, Mackendrick's direction imaginative, sly and assured, and the film crosses a tight-rope without ever losing its poise.

The first time I saw this I was troubled by its dark grotesqueries; this time, perhaps better prepared for what was in store, I thought it was quite brilliant and strangely touching in an oblique kind of way. Certainly one of the classics of the British cinema.

In case of you've forgotten, the best Ealing comedies are **Passport to Pimlico** (49) **Whisky Galore!** (49), **Kind Hearts and Coronets** (49), **The Lavender Hill Mob** (51), **The Man in the White Suit** (51), **The Maggie** (54) and **The Ladykillers** (55). NB: four of the seven directed by Mackendrick!



LAND AND FREEDOM

1995 D 3.50 7.5 GB

Loach, Ken

Barry Ackroyd

Ian Hart, Rosana Pastor, Iciar
Bollain, Tom Gilroy, Marc
Martinez

David (Hart), a young unemployed communist from Liverpool, joins a POUM militia in the fight against the Franco fascists. He sends letters home to his girlfriend about his experiences, letters which are read after his death many years later by his grand-daughter. The militia is full of ardent young idealists, many from foreign countries, eager to implement land reform in the countryside and to defeat the Francoist forces. However, the anti-fascist movement is riven with internal factions — Stalinist communists, anti-Stalinist socialists, anarchists, various unionist groups, Trotskyites all, eventually, at each others' throats.

Loach and scriptwriter Jim Allen have presented a thoughtful and well-informed portrayal of one aspect of the appalling civil war in which all of the major parties (the Francoists, Nazi Germany, Italy, the church on one side; the communists-socialists-anarchists, Russia on the other, with the major Western powers looking the other way) behaved badly. Loach's sympathies, obviously, lie with the anti-Stalinist libertarian Marxist POUM. Following his usual method Loach wants to render this conflict in a semi-documentary style though he also uses various fictional devices such as the framing story. One can't help recalling Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*; I imagine Loach wanted to capture some of the vividly-presented "life" of Orwell's book (one of the finest pieces of 20thC wartime reportage) as well as the corrosion of leftist idealism. **Land and Freedom** goes some way towards this end. It's a film which deserves our attention and respect. But I must say that I never found myself very deeply involved in either the personal narrative or the political drama. I much preferred Loach's other contribution to the political drama sub-genre, **The Wind that Shakes the Barley** (2006)



LAST ORDERS

2001 D 4.25 7.0 GB

Schepisi, Fred

Brian Tufano

Bob Hoskins, Michael Caine,
David Hemmings, Tom Courtney,
Helen Mirren, Ray Winstone

Cockney London. A man dies; to fulfil his late wishes three very old friends and his son make a long car trip, with several detours, to Margate to scatter his ashes. The film moves back and forth in time to build up a mosaic of anecdotes and memories which gradually reveal the experiences and characters of the five men and the wife. Superb ensemble acting by the six leading players with Bob Hoskins (he backed a winner getting this role!) quite outstanding. Very deft alternations of mood and of comedy and pathos. Intelligent, humane, thoughtful, accomplished and entertaining — everything that mainstream Hollywood today isn't.

The flashbacks are perhaps over-used, sometimes too abruptly. Tom Courtney's character needed a bit more fleshing out. Graham Swift won the Booker for the novel on which this is based. He has written several fine novels, most recently *Mothering Sunday*.

I didn't recognize David Hemmings (Lenny), of **Blow-Up** fame. He looks like he's done altogether too much hard living in the meantime! Tom Courtney never did get out of the funeral business (see **Billy Liar**)!

A lot of American critics couldn't cope with the Cockney accents. This was one reason among several for the very mixed reviews. I thought it a fine film.



LAVENDER HILL MOB, THE

1951 C 3.75 7.7 GB

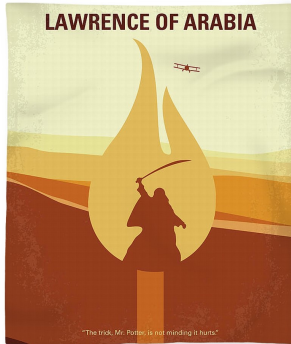
Crichton, Charles

Douglas Slocombe

Alec Guinness, Stanley Holloway,
Sid James

Meek, mild-mannered clerk (Guinness) engineers a London bullion heist along with some unlikely and more or less incompetent accomplices. Who can make more stuff-ups — the crooks or the cops? The Eiffel Tower sequence is both zany and inventive. Crisp cinematography by Douglas Slocombe. Audrey Hepburn appears momentarily in the first (and very good) sequence. Classic Ealing comedy.

One of the most celebrated of the Ealing comedies but to my taste, only mildly amusing; nowhere near **Kind Hearts and Coronets** and some distance behind **Whisky Galore**, **The Maggie**, **The Lady Killers** and **The Man in the White Suit**. However, it is all done with a nimble touch.



LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

1962 D 5.00 8.3 GB

Lean, David

Freddie Young

Peter O'Toole, Anthony Quinn,
Anthony Quayle, Omar Sharif,
Alec Guinness, Jack Hawkins,
Claude Rains

WW1 and the fight against the Ottoman Turks. The enigma of TE Lawrence, the harsh beauty and mystery of the Arabian desert, the labyrinthine complexities of Middle Eastern military strategy, imperial politics and internecine tribal conflict. The story never becomes cluttered and the film retains a clean epic sweep through the enthralling visual spectacle. What might have been a problem in having so many stellar names in the cast is averted by the fact that most of the players acquit themselves very well. As well as the performers named above we also see Arthur Kennedy, Donald Wolfitt and Jose Ferrer in significant roles. This was certainly Peter O'Toole's finest hour in a performance he never came close to matching thereafter. (Albert Finney was screen-tested for the lead role and apparently did brilliantly but then turned it down.) As well as recruiting a distinguished cast Lean and Sam Spiegel (co-producer) enlisted A-list talent elsewhere: Robert Bolt for an intelligently crafted script, Freddie Young for the awesome camerawork and Maurice Jarre to compose a stirring and memorable musical score. A BFI poll ranked this as the best British film ever — not hard to see why, a film in which soaring ambition is fully realized, and, astonishingly, a three and a half hour epic in which barely a minute is wasted and in which one's attention never flags. Quite an achievement (even leaving aside the staggering logistics of making such a film). An epic of visual poetry and dramatic power which, nearly sixty years on, still looks like a masterpiece. It is sometimes said (even by myself) that Lean wasn't that good at epics — well **Kwai**, **Lawrence**, and **Passage to India** prove otherwise; **Zhivago** was a mixed bag and **Ryan's Daughter** a complete turkey — three and a half out of five; a strike rate of 70% is pretty good! Lean had 19 credits as a director and made only one genuinely bad film (**RD**): that's impressive! Even John Ford made at least four lemons. (The only director I can think of who, as far as I know, didn't make a single dud is Dreyer, perhaps Ozu. And what about Hawks?)

English explorers and adventurers attracted to the Arabian desert: Richard, Burton, Charles M Doughty, John Philby, Bertrand Thomas, Lawrence, Gertrud Bell, Freya Stark, Wilfred Thesiger — what a line-up! (Most of them at least half-mad! And we haven't even started on the Sahara!)

THRILLS-ADVENTURE
EXCITEMENT-LAUGHTER



LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN

1960 Th 4.00 7.5 GB2

Dearden, Basil

Arthur Ibbetson

Jack Hawkins, Nigel Patrick,
Richard Attenborough, Bryan
Forbes, Roger Livesey, Robert
Coote

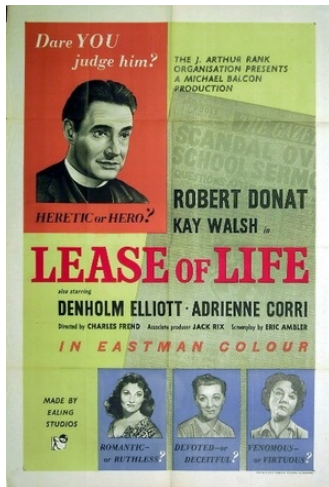
A bunch of disgruntled ex-army officers carry out a bank robbery like a military operation. Jack Hawkins is in charge of this company of scoundrels and Nigel Patrick is his 2-i-c. A breezy caper/heist movie with a generous dose of British humour (some of it, it must be said, of a schoolboyish and sometimes misogynistic kind). Neatly plotted and nicely put together. Script by Bryan Forbes (the playboy/scooter driver in the film) from a novel by John Boland. The kitchen inspection at the army base is very amusing. Roger Livesey and Hawkins are both in excellent form. Robert Coote does an all-stops-out turn as an upper-class twit, the unwelcome neighbour late in the piece.

A captious viewer might say it's a bit formulaic and not as good as the best of this sub-genre (**The Asphalt Jungle**, **Rififi**, **Bob Le Flambeur**, **Red Circle** etc). Yep, so what; it's better than 95% of them!

The gas and masks device was used in **Criss Cross**.

Most of Dearden's films have a strong social sub-text. Whilst this one is not without some telling observations it's mainly for fun. And very enjoyable it is!

One of Jack Hawkins' better quotes (not *a propo* of this film): *Hollywood is a caricature of itself.*



LEASE OF LIFE

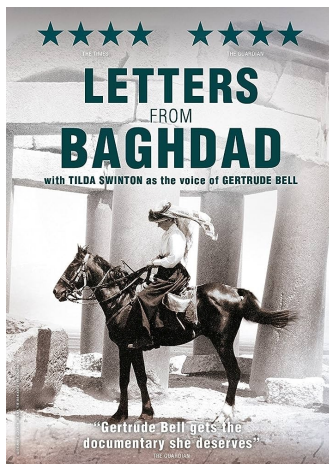
1954 D 3.50 6.8 GB

Frend, Charles

Douglas Slocombe

Robert Donat, Kay Walsh,
Denholm Elliott, Adrienne Corri

Vicar of a small rural parish (Donat) and his wife (Walsh) are trying to scrape up enough money to help their daughter go to music school in London. The vicar discovers he is dying but keeps this secret while reviewing his life, his role as a priest and his relationship with his family. A quiet, simple and modest film which I found quite engaging if slightly musty. Screenplay by Eric Ambler. An Ealing Studio production. One reviewer found it "silly, dull and morbid" so there you go. Boz Crowther opined that "It is the sort of film that older people and Anglophiles will no doubt quietly enjoy." I think this is what you call a back-handed compliment. Just a fair print with the Eastman colour gone murky. Donat had been ill for some time. This was his penultimate film, before *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* (58) and his passing in the same year.



LETTERS FROM BAGHDAD

2016 DC 4.25 6.8 GB

Sabine Krayenbuhl

Petr Hlinomaz

Tilda Swanton
(as the voice of Gertrud Bell)

LFB recounts the extraordinary life and exploits of intrepid English adventurer, spy, archaeologist and woman of great public affairs, Gertrude Bell, who travelled extensively and lived for most of her adult life in Syria, Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Egypt. Based on her own letters and on archival footage with actors playing the key figures (but not GB herself), **Letters from Baghdad** is an artfully constructed, visually appealing and historically interesting if severely limited doco. GB is presented through photos and through the voice of Tilda Swanton who does an impressive job. A little more explicit historical exposition and political analysis would have been useful: the film doesn't shed a lot of light on the tangled web of political intrigue and imperial machinations which surrounded the ill-fated creation of Iraq as an Arab state (the role of oil etc). However, the film's title pretty clearly signals its angle and its limited scope. One of the most pleasurable satisfactions of the film are Bell's very fine photos. **LB** gives us glimpses into a fascinating, heroic and ultimately sad life. One critic declared that *Gertrud Bell gets the documentary she deserves*. Agreed.

TE Lawrence on GB: *A wonderful person. Not like a woman, you know*. Hmm.

I'm now rather more motivated to take a look at Herzog's **Queen of the Desert**. (Later: I did. I shouldn't have.)



LIBEL

1959 M 3.50 7.2 GB

Asquith, Anthony

Robert Krasker

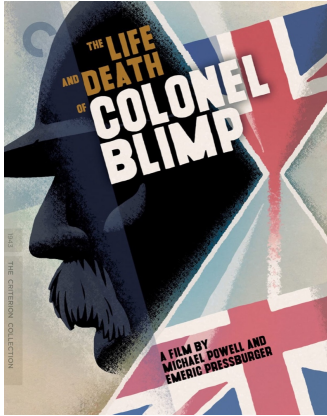
Dirk Bogarde, Olivia de Havilland,
Robert Morley, Wilfrid Hyde-
White, Paul Massie, Richard
Wattis

Dirk Bogarde is an English aristocrat whose life is turned upside down when an old wartime acquaintance reappears some years after the war and accuses him of being an imposter. Is he or isn't he? Most of the film is taken up with a court case which looks like something left over from the 40s (as does the whole film). Robert Morley and Hyde-White excel at being themselves but the standout performance by a long shot is by Dirk Bogarde.

Imposter stories seem to have been popular in the postwar Britain period: Lewis' **The Wife of Martin Guerre**, Du Maurier's **The Scapegoat** and Josephine Tey's **Brat Farrer** come to mind. They all suffer from the problem of massive implausibility (epitomised here by the ludicrous finger business). However, if you can get over that and a few very loose joints in the plot, this is sufficiently well done to keep one watching.

Asquith directed several very fine films — **The Browning Version**, **The Importance of Being Earnest**, **The Winslow Boy** among them — all of which were intelligent and stylish adaptations of excellent source material. Here he is hampered by the limitations of Edward Wooll's play (originally directed on Broadway by Otto Preminger) and its adaptation by Anatole de Grunwald (also the film's producer) and Karl Tunberg. The work by camera-meister Krasker is pleasing – along with Bogarde the primary satisfaction.

The critics gave it a fair pasting but the public at large (if we can trust IMDb) liked it rather better.



LIFE & DEATH OF COL BLIMP

1943 D 5.00 8.2 GB

Powell & Pressburger

Georges Périnal

Roger Livesey, Deborah Kerr,
Anton Walbrook, Roland Culver,
John Laurie

A flashback life-story of a pukka English soldier, a blustering old warhorse, a relic of the Boer War. The narrative unfolds through an extraordinary sequence of episodes mounted in the fashion of an exuberant revue (*sans* music) with lavish *mise-èn-scène* and florid colour, almost Sirkian! Livesey, Walbrook and Kerr are all splendid, deftly alternating between the ever-changing moods of comedy, romance and pathos. Powell and Livesey keep Blimp just this side of caricature. An audacious film which treats its themes (both the nobility and the stupidity of the old ways; loyalty and friendship; the perplexities of love) with keen intelligence and delicate satiric irony. A bravura style which sometimes anticipates the ornate grace of Ophüls' European films. Astonishing that Powell and Pressburger could pull off such an extraordinary feat in 1943! Walbrook's monologue to the immigration officer is one of the great moments in cinema. (How could Powell-Pressburger later make a film as mediocre as **Well met by Moonlight** – just goes to show... what? Everyone's entitled to one dud?) The film was controversial in GB and infuriated Churchill who stormed into Walbrook's dressing room in a West End theatre in high dudgeon: what did they think they were up to, making such a film? Walbrook replied: *No people in the world other than the English would have had the courage, in the midst of war, to tell the people such unvarnished truth.* Great story! Olivier was originally slated for lead; even he couldn't have done it any better than Livesey. The film was rated 45 in the BFI chart of 100 best British films: how absurd! This belongs near the top alongside such as **The Edge of the World**, **Brief Encounter**, **The Third Man**, **The Fallen Idol**. Scorsese was the prime mover in getting the film restored and onto DVD. Points in the bank Marty! [Later: **The Edge of the World** is Powell's best film, **Blimp** is P&P's best though some would nominate **Red Shoes/Black Narcissus/I Know Where I'm Going.**]



LOCAL HERO

1982 C 3.50 7.5 GB

Forsythe, Bill

Peter Siegert, Burt Lancaster,
Fulton Mackay, Denis Lawson

Slightly off-beat British comedy from the early 80s concerns the efforts of a Houston oil company to buy up a remote fishing village in NW Scotland. It's spruiked as belonging in the lineage of **I Know Where I'm Going** but has none of the magic of Powell's film. It does have some charm, some whimsical humour, a pleasing soundtrack by Mark Knopfler, a scenic locale and a neatly handled contrast of a small, "backward" community and the bizarre world of American big business. Pleasant — but no world-beater. Burt L enjoyed a gig to refurbish his super. (He still had 8 movies and several TV series to go to finally log up his 87 acting credits.)

Often acclaimed as one of the best films of the 80s — it may well have been... but that tells us more about that dreadful decade than the film!

The cover lists the playtime as 86 minutes: it's actually 111. Irritating how often the info on the cover is slipshod..



LOCKE

2013 Th 4.00 7.1 GB2

Knight, Stephen

Haris Zambarloukos

Tom Hardy, Ruth Wilson

Man Under Pressure, or Hell, Just One Mistake. Ivan Locke abandons his job on a huge construction site to drive to London to be with a woman who's about to give premature birth. Real-time thriller with the pressures mounting during his night-time drive, punctuated by phone calls from freaked out people wanting a piece of him. Job, marriage, family ... all under threat. Some bad memories of his father are riding shotgun. Gripping, tense, involving and generally very well done. Apart from the various voices on the phone this is a solo run, and except for the opening forty-five seconds, it all takes place in the claustrophobic confines of the car. Tom Hardy is splendid. Gotta feel for the poor guy!

Perhaps a bit too intent on being relentless. A rest from the phone calls and a bit of comic relief might have added to the overall punch.

The Bad Father strand adds little and is overdone.



LODGER, THE

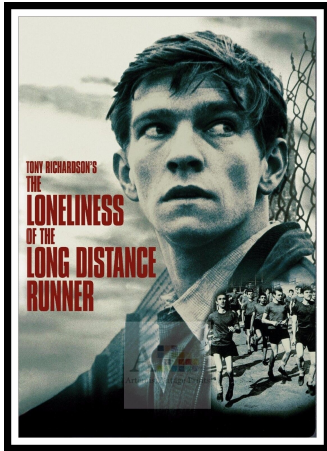
1944 Th 3.75 7.1 GB

Brahm, John

Lucien Ballard

Laird Cregar, Merle Oberon,
Cedric Hardwicke, George
Sanders, Sarah Allgood

Re-make of Hitchcock's 1927 spooker about the Jack-the-Ripper killings with Merle Oberon and Laird Cregar as Beauty and the Beast. The plot follows a predictable path but it's shrouded in plenty of atmospheric and enhanced by Lucien Ballard's stylish cinematography. Cregar and Oberon give the story a bit of bite. Brahm, writer Barré Lyndon, Sanders and Cregar revisited the formula for the less successful **Hangover Square** (1945) a couple of years later, shortly after which Cregar died at the age of about thirty. Merle Oberon was of Welsh-Sri Lankan descent, made a splash in **Wuthering Heights** (1939) as Cathy Linton, and was married to Alexander Korda before divorcing him for cameraman Lucien Ballard. Oberon: *If I found a man I loved very much I would marry him.* It happened four times.



LONELINESS OF LD RUNNER

1962 D 4.25 7.7 GB

Richardson, Tony

Walter Lassally

Tom Courtney, Michael
Redgrave, Alec McCowen, Avis
Bunnage

One of the vanguard films in the British New Wave/Kitchen Sink movement of the late 50s and early 60s, based on Alan Sillitoe's story. A compelling performance by Tom Courtney in his screen debut, and some vivid and dynamic cinematography by Walter Lassally. The opening and closing stanzas of the film are excellent indeed but there's some sag in the middle.

The break in naturalism with the diagrammatic stars in the middle passage is very annoying and quite pointless. The score, typical of the period, is a fairly awful mix of would-be "jazz" and TV style lounge music. The plot has a few loose ends; whatever happened, for instance, to the new housemaster of whom much is made in the early sequences?

A fine film for sure but not as good as either **Room at the Top** or **This Sporting Life** which were directed with more flair, more conviction and more grit. (Tony Richardson was/is an over-rated director... but credit where it's due.)

Edward Fox (uncredited) appears as the other runner.

Great title!

2019: I rate this more highly this time around: Courtney's performance and Lassally's camerawork are really exceptional.



LONG ARM, THE

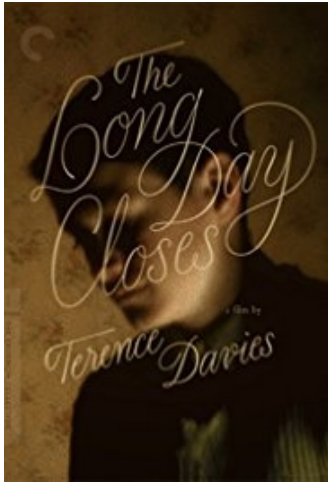
1956 Th 3.50 7.1 GB2

Frend, Charles

Gordon Dines

Jack Hawkins, John Stratton,
Dorothy Alison, Geoffrey Keen

Sub-John Creasey police procedural about a series of robberies which are causing Superintendent Halliday (Hawkins) some consternation. Carefully plotted and with a detailed exposition of police methodology. Plenty of well-known landmarks and locales — the Thames, Covent Garden, Festival Hall, northern Wales. Yes, there are domestic scenes (rather tame) and a railway sequence. One reviewer suggested that “this is the sort of film to watch if you are off work on a midweek afternoon.” (You can choose something better for the evening! Let’s say something like **The Blue Lamp** which inaugurated a rash of police procedurals both on the big screen and the little one. I did watch this one in the afternoon.) Ford’s **Gideon of Scotland Yard** and Gordon Parry’s **Front Page Story** follow much the same template. Hawkins has the lead in all of them. Alec McCowen and Ian Bannen appear momentarily. Most of the cast, Hawkins excepted, are pedestrian. Charles Frend, as far as I can see, only made one impressive film, **The Cruel Sea** (53), three years before this. Aka **The Third Key**.



LONG DAY CLOSES, THE

1992 DC 4.50 7.5 GB

Davies, Terence

Michael Coulter

Leigh McCormack, Marjorie
Yates, Anthony Watson, Nicholas
Lamont

The long day closes: the end of childhood. Davies' more or less autobiographical reverie focused on a short moment in time at a specific place in the middle of a particular family, all seen and felt and heard through the boy (whom one supposes to be eleven or twelve), a sensitive, unsure, dreamy and lonely boy despite the warmth of his family life. (The elephant, or at least phantom presence, in the room is the absent father, dealt with in **Distant Voices, Still Lives** (1988)). No plot in the conventional sense, very little dialogue, a lot of music of various sorts, and a stately and carefully choreographed passing of images and sounds: the "real" – family life, school, church, parties, the streets of Liverpool; and the fantastic – Doris Day, Nat King Cole, Debbie Reynolds, the *sounds* (dialogue and music) of films of the 40s and 50s, and the radio. All done, obviously and deliberately through the prism of Davies' memory. Indeed the film might be called *Memory through Cinema, Cinema as Memory or Remembering the Cinema*.

The self-conscious and "arty" style of Davies, most conspicuously evident in the use of sound and in the very studied lighting effects, annoyed me a good deal in **The Deep Blue Sea** but here it works a treat. Without having seen much of Davies' output it would seem that his approach to film-making is less suited to straight drama and more to something occupying a slightly elusive position somewhere between the documentary and the experimental "arthouse" modes. I liked this film a lot, and **Time and the City** (2008) even better.



LONG GOOD FRIDAY, THE

1979 G 3.75 7.7 GB2

Mackenzie, John

Phil Meheux

Bob Hoskins, Helen Mirren, Leo Dolen, Patti Love, Paul Freeman

Cockney crime boss with big plans for redeveloping the London docklands is losing control of his empire. Car bombs, brutal killings, explosions... what the hell is going on and who's behind it? Ingeniously plotted, sharp script, good characterization and several interwoven themes and social/political concerns. Avoids some of the more threadbare clichés of the gangster genre (eg. the representation of women) and goes beyond generic conventions in various ways. Maintains its pace, develops some tension, and is sometimes darkly humorous (I especially enjoyed the end of the abattoir sequence). Helen Mirren and Bob Hoskins are not amongst my favourite actors but they both do well here. This was Hoskins' break-out role. The American Mafia guys were quite unconvincing.

How bad were the fashions of the late seventies! — clothes, hairstyles, music etc.

The visual style of the film didn't do much for me. (It suffers badly in comparison with **The Little Foxes** which I saw immediately preceding; look, for instance, at Wyler/Toland's sense of space; **LGF** has no sense of space at all.)

In summary: intelligent script, great performances, but only workmanlike in most other respects.



LONG HAUL, THE

1957 Th 3.75 6.9 GB2

Hughes, Ken

Basil Emott

Victor Mature, Diana Dors,
Patrick Allen, Gene Anderson,
Liam Redmond, Peter Reynolds

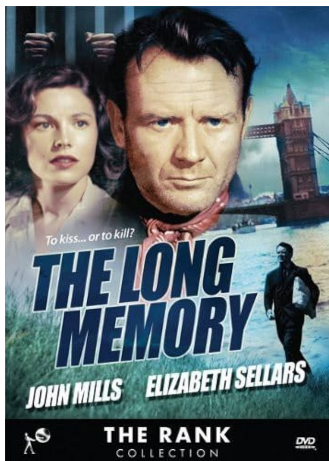
Liverpool, Glasgow and Scottish highlands and coast. Noirish B-thriller taken from a novel by Mervyn Mills. Harry Miller (Mature), a discharged American soldier, takes his wife and kid from Germany to England. Gets involved, inadvertently at first, in both a trucking racket and a second-rate romance with a hoodlum's babe (guess who). He soon becomes a man with more than a truckload of problems.

Hard-boiled British thriller with some traction. Efficiently directed and shot in BW widescreen, with Victor doing his world-weary turn as a man who gets some bad breaks. DD is better than expected (her main go is always a lot of pouting, slinking, flouncing and eyelash batting) while Patrick Allen makes a menacing bad guy. The Leyland truck figures prominently. Some of the dialogue is pretty lame and the plot contrivances are sometimes intrusive. You'll be reminded of **Thieves Highway**, **They Drive by Night** and **The Wages of Fear** but this one doesn't have that kind of horse-power. Still, a solid and workmanlike thriller all round.

The poster says "Silk, flesh and dynamite": there's no silk, no dynamite and not that much flesh.

IMDb wrongly lists this as 100 minutes; it's 88 minutes (and not, it seems a cut version). 88 minutes was enough.

Ken Hughes' finest hour was the under-rated **The Trials of Oscar Wilde** (1960) with Peter Finch.



LONG MEMORY, THE

1952 Th 3.75 7.0 GB2

Hamer, Robert

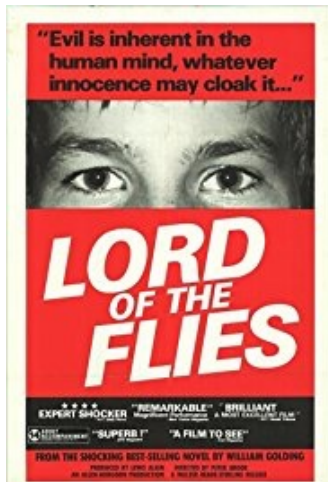
Harry Waxman

John Mills, Eva Bergh, Elizabeth Sellars, John McCallum

A grim and grimy post-war England. Released from jail after twelve years, wrongly convicted man (Mills) goes after those who betrayed him, one of whom (Sellars) has since married the police detective (McCallum) who had arrested him. The action takes place in the bays and marshes around Gravesend and in London. The plot is not without contrivances and a couple of sequences are a bit clunky. Nonetheless there is a good deal to like here: the cinematography, especially in the estuary and barge scenes; the unpolished but quite touching performance of Eva Bergh; a moderate level of tension. Also interesting to see Geoffrey Keen (the journalist) play a quite uncharacteristic role; he's usually a model of urbanity and rectitude.

The moral of the story (revenge doesn't pay; kissing's better than killing) is too explicit. Bit too much cross-cutting. Elizabeth Sellars is not quite up to it.

Hamer made one great film (**Kind Hearts and Coronets**) and one very good one (**It Always Rains on Sundays**). The rest of his work is very uneven, as indeed is this particular film. But he has a kind of oblique tenderness and an understated sense of invisible realities which is quite interesting.



LORD OF THE FLIES

1963 D 3.50 7.0 GB

Brook, Peter

Tom Hollyman

Hugh Edwards, James Aubrey,
Tom Chapin, Roger Elwin, Tom
Gaman

Based on William Golding's runaway best-seller about the descent into savagery of a bunch of English schoolboys marooned on an island during a nuclear apocalypse. A bleak Darwinian scenario about the fragility of civilization, the struggle for survival, class difference and mob mentality. A strong antidote to romantic Swiss Family Robinson-type idylls about man-in-nature survival etc. I liked the credits sequence. Powerful ending. Not all the boys are up to their parts but Jack Aubrey (as Ralph) is impressive.

Perhaps a little too self-consciously arty and over-stated in its search for effect. An admixture of *cinéma vérité* and arthouse styles. Some stilted dialogue. How be it that all the adults perish and all the children survive the crash, and how do they get ashore in dry clothes? (Let's not be too pedantic and literal-minded...but still...)

Shot in Puerto Rico on a small budget, a rudimentary script and with a good deal of improvisation. A very bold project if not altogether satisfactorily realized. Still stands up OK.

1963 was a pretty scary year: **Strangelove**, **Seven Days in May**, **Fail Safe**, **Lord of the Flies**, **The Birds**, **Shock Corridor**, **The Trial**, **The Damned**, **The Servant**, **The Silence**.



LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

1975 D 3.75 8.0 GB

Cukor, George

Slocombe, Douglas

Katherine Hepburn, Laurence Olivier, Colin Blakely, Richard Pearson, Leigh Lawson

London, 1911. Former actress and now wealthy, widowed socialite (Hepburn) is being sued by a much younger man for “breach of promise”. Distinguished barrister (Olivier) is enlisted to defend her. Turns out they had a short but simmering romance many years earlier...in Toronto! An engaging mixture of romantic comedy and courtroom drama in which Kate and Larry are given plenty of scope to display their theatrical talents. Some deliciously witty dialogue and some very deft fencing by both protagonists! It’s really a vehicle for these two super talents to strut their stuff. Shot by Douglas Slocombe in rather a pretty style. It’s a soufflé really — light, fluffy, appetizing but not very substantial. “Charming” is the adjective which irresistibly presents itself. Doesn’t have the bite or edge of Cukor’s early comedies — but it’s a very pleasant and agreeable entertainment (made for TV by the look of it).

(Although they give the thing a fair shot one can’t help feeling that it’s a case of ageing talents — Hepburn, Olivier, Cukor, Slocombe — topping up their funds from the bottomless coffers of the TV companies.)



MADELEINE

1950 M 4.00 7.0 GB

Lean, David

Guy Green

Ann Todd, Ivan Desny, Norman Woodland, André Morrell, Barry Jones, Leslie Banks

Based on a true and very controversial mid-19thC case in which an upper-class woman is accused of murdering her French lover. Did she or didn't she? The tropes and conventions of the Victorian/Edwardian mystery/courtroom drama are thoughtfully inflected and explored in Lean's stylish film (beautifully shot by Guy Green). The fact that there is something cold and metallic about Ann Todd serves the story well. Morell and Jones are splendid in the courtroom sequences. Norman Woodland is impressive in the transition from empty vessel to a victim of another kind. Explores class, patriarchy, marriage-and-money, the position of women, passion and convention — in short, many of the central themes of Victorian fiction — and does so with those characteristic qualities of tact, intelligence, aesthetic intuition and dramatic sense which made Lean such an impressive director through the 40 and 50s (before the Blockbuster seduced him). A fine film. Perhaps a touch cerebral, not as emotionally or imaginatively engaging as Lean's very best work. The defence counsel's eloquent speech is taken from the actual court transcripts. The deliberately ambiguous ending left audiences dissatisfied; the film was not a big commercial success and Lean himself had strong misgivings — but these may well have been due to his difficulties with his very new wife (who was also his cousin) both on and off the set.

It's not in the top bracket of Lean films but it does nothing to compromise his status as one of Britain's two finest directors (the other, of course, being Michael Powell).

My Lean rankings:

Brief Encounter/Oliver Twist/Lawrence of Arabia

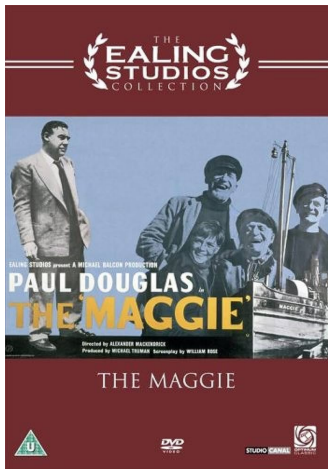
Great Expectations/This Happy Breed/In Which We Serve/Hobson's Choice

Bridge on the River Kwai/A Passage to India/Summertime

Madeleine/The Passionate Friends

The Sound Barrier/Doctor Zhivago

Ryan's Daughter (coming in 20 lengths behind the pack)



MAGGIE, THE

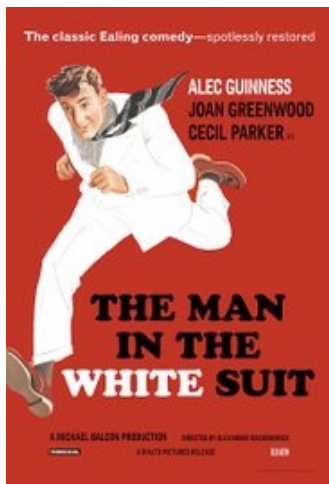
1954 C 4.25 7.1 GB

Mackendrick, Alexander

Gordon Dines

Paul Douglas, Alex Mackenzie,
Geoffrey Keen, James Copeland,
Tommy Kearins

American businessman is trying to get a cargo delivered but is outfoxed by the crew of an old Scottish “puffer”. Douglas is excellent as the American but Alex Mackenzie, the salty old skipper, steals the show while Tommy Kearins is very endearing as the “wee laddie”. Mackendrick was responsible for the story as well as the direction. Interesting film-maker was Mackendrick, out of a different mould: **Whisky Galore!**, **The Man in the White Suit**, **The Maggie**, **The Ladykillers**, **The Sweet Smell of Success** — most of them with some bite and sting as well as laughs. **The Maggie** is just the sort of quarry which the cinephile is constantly pursuing: a neglected treasure which is much better than its very modest reputation. This is altogether charming, amusing, whimsical, deceptively “naïve” but with some real edge. It is sometimes compared to **Whisky Galore!** and to the later **Local Hero**: true, it doesn't have the infectious quality or zing of **WG** but it's way better than **LH**. Some critics complained that it was “nasty”, “parochial”, that it put down “foreigners” (ie. Americans), that it showed both Scots and Americans in a bad light, that the plot was a bit malicious, even “xenophobic”! I kid you not. Is this some kind of weird “political correctness”? What is wrong with these people?? Even the *Time Out* critic didn't know what to make of it. For a sample of the kind of nonsense written about the film see Graeme Clark's review for *The Spinning Image*; you can find it through MRQE. One of the better reviews was provided by Boz Crowther who found it all tremendous fun, as I did. Aka: **High and Dry**.



MAN IN THE WHITE SUIT

1950 C 3.75 7.4 GB

Mackendrick, Alexander

Douglas Slocombe

Alec Guinness, Cecil Parker,
Joan Greenwood, Michael
Gough, Ernest Thesiger

Eccentric and under-employed boffin (Guinness, of course) discovers a magical new fabric ... which leads to all sorts of trouble. This is billed as another “Ealing Comedy” — which it sort of is... but not really. It’s amusing rather than knockdown funny but it’s also quite dark, absurdist, provocative, political. Guinness, Parker and Greenwood all deliver very accomplished performances, and Thesiger (Wilfrid’s brother) is a hoot. Very nicely shot by Douglas Slocombe. Apparently the film, amongst other things, is a satire on the Ealing Studio with many of the characters based on real-life figures in the Ealing constellation — eg. Birnley (Parker) is based on the film’s producer and Ealing heavy, Michael Balcon.

Consider Alexander Mackendrick ... this, **The Sweet Smell of Success**, **The Lady Killers**; there is a dark and satiric vein there. As a *Time Out* reviewer observed, “there is enough of Kafka in the film to lift it right out of the Ealing comedy tramlines”.

A good many critics are very slow on the uptake with Mackendrick; he’s one of the major British directors of the period.



MAN OF ARAN

1934 DC 5.00 7.5 GB

Flaherty, Robert

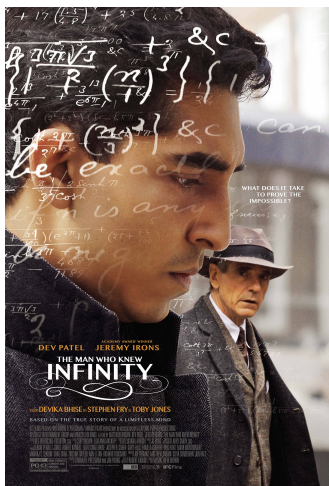
Robert Flaherty

Colman King, Maggie Durrane,
Michael Durrane

Flaherty's extraordinary 1934 documentary about the harsh and elemental life of the people on Aran, a rocky island off the west coast of Ireland. Two years in the making it was a massive landmark in the history of documentary film-making. Full of images of the sea, sky and barren land, and of man's heroic battle with the elements. Poetry rather than sociology. (This is the irrefutable riposte to the film's many critics.)

The shark hunt occupies roughly the second half of the film; it goes on too long, especially for modern audiences. Insofar as the film has any "narrative" it is nearly all staged – eg. the three lead "characters" were not actually related but were chosen for their photogenic appeal. The shark hunts were no longer practiced at the time Flaherty filmed. The soundtrack was imposed later. Has been dubbed by its critics as "doco-fiction". In any event, the film fully achieves its purpose of preserving something of a vanishing way of life. **Man of Aran** is the Gold Standard of the quasi-ethnographic documentary.

Maggie Durrane did nearly drown during filming of the opening sequence!



MAN WHO KNEW INFINITY

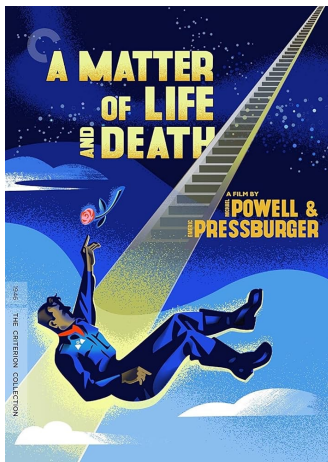
2015 D 4.25 7.2 GB

Brown, Matt

Larry Smith

Dev Patel, Jeremy Irons, Toby Jones, Devika Bhise, Jeremy Northam, Stephen Fry

Biopic of Indian maths prodigy, Srinivasa Ramanujan (Patel), and his relationship with the Cambridge mathematics don G.H. Hardy (Irons). There is nothing remarkable about the style of film-making but Patel and Irons both give finely textured performances, and the story itself *is* remarkable. Visually it's a bit glossy — reminiscent of other biopics of individuals with some kind of mysterious genius — **A Beautiful Mind**, **Imitation Game**, and, by all accounts **A Theory of Everything** (unseen). The film has been treated in condescending/trivializing terms by many of the critics. Here's a fair sample from Susan Wloszczyna ("Roger Ebert"): *We do love our male geniuses these days. Even more so, apparently, if their presence ever graced the hallowed halls of Cambridge at some point. And if they faced a major hurdle in life, such as a debilitating disease, closeted homosexuality or control freak issues? That only humanizes the bright fellow all the more. Of course, behind every great man must be a self-sacrificing woman who stands by their side or, otherwise, there would be no emotional pull to balance all that complex geek-speak chatter. No matter that the lives of many of these ladies often would provide enough material for a potentially fascinating film all on their own.* It deserves better than that. It's true that the film never really penetrates the arcane world of higher mathematics but the human story in both East and West is poignant and well handled. Part of the distaste of some of the critics, no doubt, is explained by the spiritual dimensions of Ramanujan's story. Then, too, some of them couldn't be less interested in a film that tries to capture the workings of such a mind and sensibility.



MATTER OF LIFE & DEATH

1946 D 3.75 8.1 GB

Powell, M. & EP

Jack Cardiff

David Niven, Kim Hunter, Roger Livesey, Raymond Massey, Marius Goring

Powell & Pressburger's widely-heralded semi-fantasy film about a RAF pilot who escapes Death and who must then appear in a celestial court to determine if he should be allowed to live. It's imaginative, inventive, daring in some ways and altogether odd. A strange concoction of fantasy, comedy, satire, whimsy, dream and drama. It's also a highly artificial and reflexive piece of film-making (the elaborate conceit about stopping time, moving through space etc). The first fifteen minutes are particularly good. It's clever, it's highly polished and it's quite entertaining ... but not really my cup of Bonox. Even odder than the film itself is the fact that it was deliberately made as a propaganda film to beef up Anglo-American relations. It was, reportedly, Powell's favorite. It was a huge popular success.

Heaven as a hyper-efficient British Civil Service???



MCKENZIE BREAK, THE

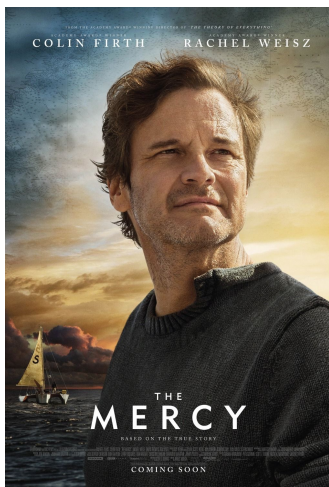
1970 A 3.50 6.5 GB

Johnson, Lamont

Michael Reed

Brian Keith, Helmut Griem, Ian
Hendry, Jack Watson

Remote WW2 POW camp in Scotland. Routine wartime escape drama but this time it's captured German naval and Luftwaffe officers trying to outwit their British captors. They're acting up and causing mayhem, and the C.O. (Hendry) is out of his depth. Irish hard-man/maverick, Captain Connor (Keith), is sent in to sort out the mess. There are only three characters that matter: Connor, Kapitän Schlüter (Griem), the German officer master-minding the escape, and the camp commandant. The dynamics of this triangle (lots of mind-games!) provide most of the interest but there are also several action sequences which generate some tension and edge, culminating in a better-than-average if slightly over-cooked climax/resolution. Brian Keith enjoys his role and is well supported by Griem and Hendry. Shot (in Ireland and Turkey) in dark tones with murky colours befitting the subject. Lots of khaki, mud, clouds, rain and a small dose of moral quandaries. Based on a fictionalized account of real-life events, *The Bowmanville Break*, by Sidney Shelley. Another film about German POW escapes: **The One that Got Away** (1957, Roy Ward Baker) with Hardy Kruger.



MERCY, THE

2018 D 3.50 6.0 GB

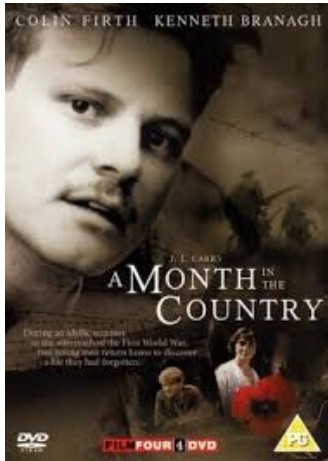
Marsh, James

Colin Firth, Rachel Weisz, David Thewlis

Donald Crowhurst was an English family man, an amateur sailor with very little experience, an electronics whizz and a designer/inventor who entered the *Sunday Times* Around-the-World non-stop Sailing Race in 1968. He came to grief... The film is an earnest, worthy and generally unsuccessful attempt to tell this strange and bizarre story. Some years ago I read *The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* which I found quite mesmerizing in its slow, meticulous and highly detailed and sometimes imaginative reconstruction of Crowhurst's preparation for the race, the long and circuitous voyage and his gradual disintegration. The film subverts any possible tension by giving the game away far too early and takes the rather easy way out of "blaming" the pressures that built up on Crowhurst prior to his departure; the book is much more complex, exploratory and deeply disturbing. Although it tries hard the film also fails to give any real sense of life at sea for the solo sailor. Nor does it pay any meaningful attention to the astonishing story of the race as a whole and to the other competitors — probably not possible in a film of this duration. (I see that the DVD version is already at least ten minutes shorter than the theatre release.)

Looking at James Marsh's CV there is little reason to be surprised that this film is not better than it is. His only really successful outing has been the documentary **Man on a Wire** (2008).

The story of the race as a whole is compellingly told in an absolutely gripping book by Peter Nichols, **A Voyage for Madmen**.



MONTH IN THE COUNTRY, A

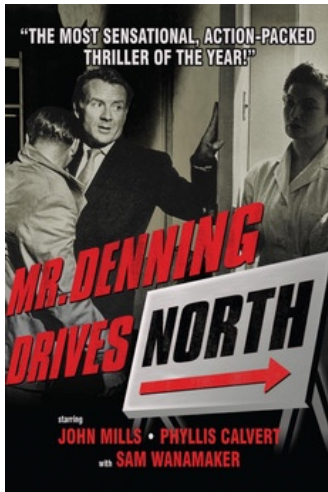
1987 D 3.75 7.1 GB

O'Connor, Pat

Kenneth MacMillan

Colin Firth, Natasha Richardson,
Kenneth Branagh, Patrick
Malahide, Richard Vernon

J.L. Carr's novel (which I re-read a year or two ago and hugely enjoyed, again) is a quiet meditation on the rhythms of life in pre-industrial England, on religion, art and the search for meaning, and on the psychological ravages and dislocations of war. It's also a story about "what might have been", about the fugitive possibilities of love, and the forms that love might take. The story turns around three characters: a shell-shocked ex-soldier who is restoring a medieval mural in a remote Yorkshire church, another damaged ex-soldier engaged in a nearby archaeological dig, and the beautiful young wife of the saturnine and embittered vicar. The film can't quite catch the delicacy and poignancy of the novel but it's a fair attempt, made more interesting by the appearance of three actors — Firth, Branagh, Richardson — on the brink of long screen careers. (For such obviously talented actors they have all been in an alarming number of lemons; such is the nature of the contemporary industry.) The poetic imagery of burying, digging, and uncovering is handled with some restraint. It's a minor-key film of limited scope and modest ambition, but it's nicely done (even if the misty soft-focus sequences occasionally flirt with the worn-out visual clichés of screen pastoral). Irish director Pat O'Connor is probably best-known for his early IRA film, **Cal** (1984). His other films, generally, have not attracted critical favour.



MR DENNING DRIVES NORTH

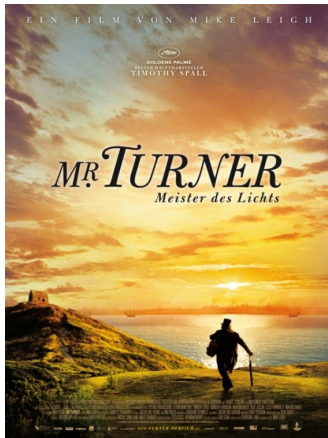
1951 Th 3.75 6.7 GB2

Kimmins, Anthony

John Mills, Phyllis Calvert, Eileen Moore, Sam Wanamker, Herbert Lom, Bernard Lee, Wilfred Hyde-White

Aircraft designer and company executive (Mills) accidentally kills a nasty fellow (Lom) who is pursuing his daughter. He foolishly tries a cover up but finds himself in sticky jam. He drives north — several times! The wife (Calvert) follows Tammy Wynette's advice: she stands by her man. Plenty of engaging characters, a competent cast, some intricate courtroom proceedings, and a fair dose of humour and suspense all run cover for an implausible plot. This modest and well-crafted film seems to be almost entirely forgotten. It's not good enough to be called a buried treasure but it certainly deserves a higher profile.

Anthony Kimmins' somewhat ambiguous claim to fame is his directorial role on the Australian kids' flicks, **Smiley** (1956) and **Smiley Gets His Gun** (1958). He also directed **The Amorous Mr Prawn** (1962) — one can only imagine!! (IMDb score: 5.7)



MR. TURNER

2014 D 4.00 6.8 GB

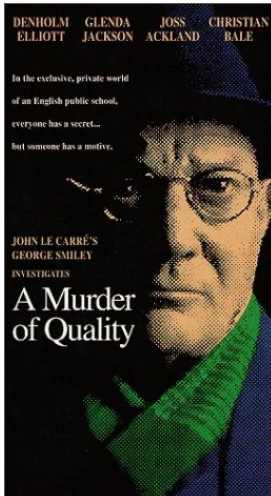
Leigh, Mike

Dick Pope

Timothy Spall, Paul Jesson.
Dorothy Atkinson, Marion Bailey,
Martin Savage, Joshua McGuire

Great Artist Biopic covering the second half of the life of JW Turner, the eccentric, cantankerous and contrary painter, focusing on his obsessive pursuit of light, colour and movement, his emotional paralysis in most of his family relationships (the father excepted), his ambiguous dealings with the Royal Academy and the world of "high art". Shot in widescreen in a style and with a colour palette attuned to Turner's paintings. Spall is utterly convincing, Marion Bailey gives a charming performance as Mrs Booth and Joshua McGuire introduces some sly humour as the young John Ruskin. The film doesn't romanticize the sometimes unlikeable Turner and renders well his inner conflicts and his psychic disturbances without indulging in too much facile psychologizing. The personality and the art are allowed to retain something of their strangeness and mystery. It occasionally threatens to get a little self-important but mostly maintains enough distance from its subject to retain its poise. An enormous amount of care has been invested in the details. I found it engrossing and entertaining.

Some critics have seen the film as also being a self-portrait of Mike Leigh. Who knows? I hope not. (I didn't warm to ML in the Extras.)



MURDER OF QUALITY, A

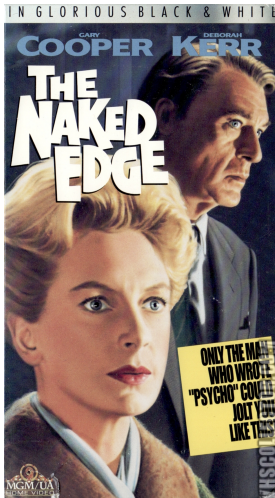
1991 Th 3.50 6.5 GB2

Millar, Gavin

Dennis Crossan

Denholm Elliott, Joss Ackland,
Glenda Jackson, Billie Whitelaw,
Ronald Pickup, Christian Bale

Le Carré scripted this BBC TV-film of his first book in which George Smiley is sleuthing a case in which a woman is killed at a boy's boarding school in the south of England. Neatly plotted, interesting characters, astringent dialogue and efficiently constructed with a cast of old pros. Le Carré still hasn't discovered his real metier, Cold War espionage, but this story anticipates many of his abiding themes of guilt, deception, betrayal, class and the moral corruption of "England". Smiley is here a relatively undeveloped character, played well enough by Denholm Eliot, but without the ambiguous mystique and feline cunning of his later incarnations. Cinematically the film is undistinguished, occasionally clichéd, but the characters, the dialogue, the plot and the acting make it very watchable entertainment. I enjoyed seeing Glenda Jackson again after all these years. (For a while there in the late 60s, early 70s she seemed to be in everything but I haven't sighted her for ages.) Clearly made-for-TV. The plot is a bit Agatha Christie-ish — not in itself a bad thing but missing some of the intricacies and subtleties of Le Carré's later plots. Denholm Elliott died within a year of making this.



NAKED EDGE, THE

1960 Th 3.75 6.7 GB2

Anderson, Michael

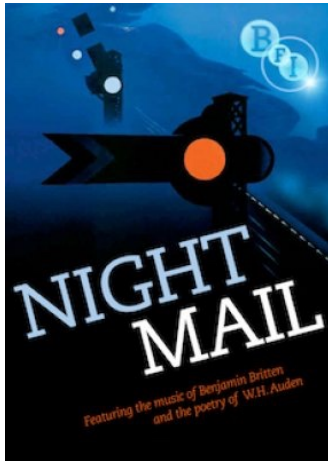
Erwin Hillier

Deborah Kerr, Gary Cooper, Eric Portman, Michael Wilding, Diane Cilento, Hermione Gingold

Woman on the Edge of a Nervous Breakdown or *Did he, didn't he?* Story opens with a murder and a trial and then jumps forwards five years. Wife suspects her businessman husband may have been involved. It's a highly contrived plot which asks us to swallow quite a large chunk of implausibility. But Deborah Kerr is compelling, Coop is just OK (his last film; he died in 1961); the supporting cast is uniformly good. Yes, it's certainly sub-Hitchcock (but that's true of everyone except Hitch himself and even he is sometimes sub; there's no supra-Hitchcock). Anderson tries various Hitchcockian moves, some of which work and some don't. What we want from this kind of film is uncertainty, anxiety, suspense, dread: there's plenty of each! To follow Chekhov: when a razor appears in the first act, you know it will be used in the third. Badly over-cooked score.

This copied a fair shellacking from the few critics who wrote about it. It's certainly not without its problems but I thought it made quite a suspenseful thriller. Written by Joseph Stefano, the author of **Psycho**. Echoes of **Suspicion**, **Midnight Lace**, and **Unfaithfully Yours** (though there's hardly a laugh to be found in this one, apart from the scene with the bibliophile) and a bunch of other psycho-thrillers involving couples. Michael Anderson made some pretty ordinary films, and a small handful of quite good ones. This might be his best.

Film titles: **The Naked ... Alibi, City, and the Dead, Edge, Gun, Kiss, Jungle, Lunch, Spur.**



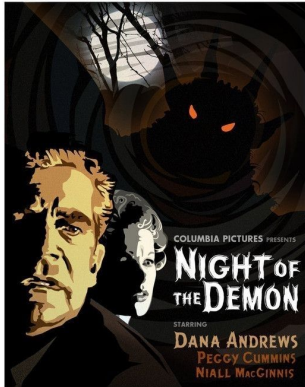
NIGHT MAIL

1936 DC 4.25 6.8 GB

Watt, Harry & Basil Wright

Produced by the short-lived GPO Film Unit, **Night Mail** is a track-rattling 1936 British doco about the overnight mail train from London to Glasgow, and the massive logistical exercise devoted to the collection, sorting and distribution of the mail. Its closing sequences are quite lyrical. The project attracted some serious talent: WH Auden (verse), Benjamin Britten (music), documentary pioneer John Grierson (narration) and Alberto Calvacanti (production). Inventive use of sound, image, editing etc. Harry Watt did most of the directing with some assistance from Basil Wright. It is one of the most widely-known and best-loved of British documentaries, still popular even today.

(**Night Mail 2** is a sequel made in 1986 to commemorate the 1936 film. It documents the same subject fifty years on. As usual with sequels, it falls a full platform length behind the original.)



NIGHT OF THE DEMON

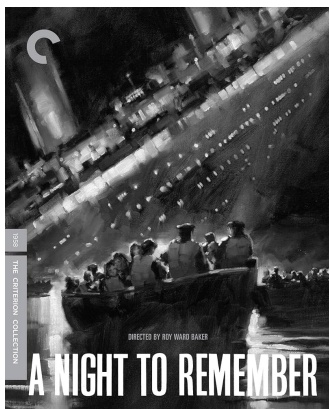
1957 H 3.75 7.6 GB2

Tourneur, Jacques

Ted Scaife

Dana Andrews, Maurice Denham,
Niall MacGinnis, Peggy Cummins

Sceptical American psychologist (Andrews) arrives in England to investigate an occult witchcraft group and their sinister leader; he gets more than he bargained for. Formerly another professor has been on the trail but has come to grief; his daughter is now in the frame. Country mansions, runes, black cats, apparitions, seances, hypnotism etc — a panoply of Gothic effects — but handled with some restraint apart from the explicit monster scenes which the studio foisted on an unhappy Tourneur. A few touches of Franju. The cast does quite well apart from Dana Andrews who gives a listless performance. The best sequence is probably the last. The complex Karswell character (very well played by MacGinnis) is loosely based, apparently, on the notorious Aleister Crowley. Peggy Cummins' best-known performance was in **Gun Crazy**. This is a step or two down from **Cat People** and **The Leopard Man** but an interesting outing in which there is much to like.



NIGHT TO REMEMBER, A

1958 D 4.00 7.9 GB2

Baker, Roy Ward

Geoffrey Unsworth

Kenneth More, Ronald Allen,
Robert Ayres

An energetic but restrained telling of the Titanic disaster, scripted by the talented Eric Ambler from the book by Walter Lord. Roy Baker (**Don't Bother to Knock**) keeps things moving at a good clip and, in the main, avoids undue mawkishness. A large ensemble cast — most of them perform well; Michael Goodlife as Andrews is particularly impressive. A good many well-known English actors of the period make brief appearances, Alec McGowen, David McCallum, Honor Blackman among them. The depiction of the ship being damaged and flooded is well done even if the final ocean scenes are not altogether convincing. Some telling jabs delivered to class snobbery etc. Baker and Ambler went to a great deal of trouble to make the film as historically accurate as possible.

We know about Kenneth More's limitations as an actor — but he is well cast here. I saw this at boarding school in about 1962. It has stood up pretty well; it's certainly a long way better than James Cameron's ludicrously bloated, over-hyped and soggy film of the early 90s.

Baker was Irish — which might have given his critique of class some of its edge.



NIGHT TRAIN TO MUNICH

1940 Th 3.50 7.3 GB

Reed, Carol

Otto Kanturek

Rex Harrison, Margaret Lockwood, Paul von Hemreid, Basil Radford, Nauntaon Wayne

Very English war-time suspense/comedy with a conspicuous debt to **The Lady Vanishes** (by the same script writers). Clearly a studio-job made on the cheap with some pretty dodgy sets. The actors enjoy themselves in what is not much more than an early wartime jape. Rex Harrison brings his usual wit and *savoir-faire* to his role.

One of Carol Reed's early efforts. Another one that fits into the "easy entertainment on a hot, lazy summer's night movie" category. Entertaining, with a few impressive sequences. But overall take-it-or-leave it.



NO LOVE FOR JOHNNIE

1961 D 3.75 7.3 GB

Thomas, Ralph

Ernest Steward

Peter Finch, Mary Peach, Billie Whitelaw, Geoffrey Keen, Dennis Price, Stanley Holloway, Donald Pleasance

Johnnie Byrne (Finch) is an ambitious Labour member for a Yorkshire constituency; his private and professional lives become entangled. The action veers from bedrooms to bars to the Houses of Parliament. Its ruminations on political ambition are no less topical today than they were then. There are three women, and the inevitable parting on a railway station. Dennis Price has a cameo as a photographer and the awful Oliver Reed appears briefly.

Why was this shot in Cinemascope?

Ralph Thomas is a journeyman of the British cinema; he made a few OK films (the later version of **The Thirty Nine Steps**, **The Clouded Yellow**) and quite a few duds. This film proves what we know perfectly well already: if you surround a pedestrian director with a good crew, an intelligent script and some acting pros, the results can be pretty good, as is the case here. This is no show-stopper but it's fine, well-crafted entertainment; it gets some zap from Finch's supple performance. "Mary Peach"...really?



NORTH WEST FRONTIER

1959 A 4.25 7.2 GB2

Thompson, J Lee

Geoffrey Unsworth

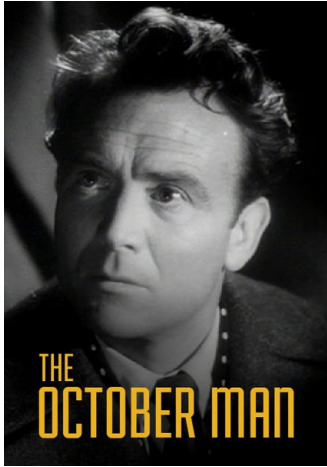
Kenneth More, Lauren Bacall,
Herbert Lom, Wilfrid Hyde White,
I.S. Johar

Ripping Yarn (in the lineage of **Bengal Lancers**, **Gunga Din**, **Bhowani Junction** etc) with some elements of a serious political drama thrown in. Applies the tried and true formula of confining a small group of people together in a perilous situation (*à la* **Stagecoach** to mention one obvious antecedent), this time on a train. Thompson (**Cape Fear**) churns out the tension and excitement, the characterisation is fleshed out, and much of the dialogue is snappy and literate. Cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth does some splendid work, especially in the first thirty minutes. The treatment of political and racial themes, whilst not terribly deep, is intelligent and thoughtful (though the film does suffer from a degree of ideological schizophrenia with various Kiplingesque motifs implicit in the narrative). The script is by Frank Nugent and Patrick Ford (son of) which perhaps explains some of the affinities with the Western. Herbert Lom makes an interesting “villain”, provides a useful counterweight to the prevailing imperial ethos, and precludes the Muslims being presented as no more than savage marauding hordes. Not a bad train movie either!

Kenneth More and Lauren Bacall together?: most implausible! More is exasperatingly one-dimensional, as always. Lauren Bacall does well with her part, but it might have been further developed. (She is also stunningly beautiful!) Herbert Lom sounds not unlike Richard Burton. Hadn't realized J Lee Thompson was English.

A pleasant surprise — I was looking for mindless entertainment but this offered rather more.

Aka: **Flame Over India**



OCTOBER MAN, THE

1947 Th 3.75 7.1 GB

Baker, Roy Ward

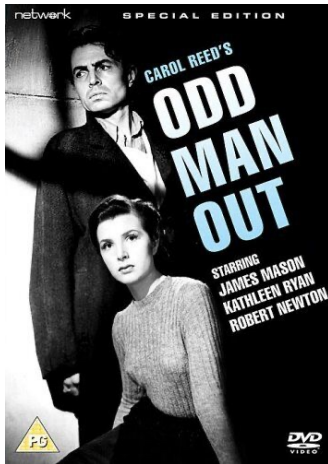
Hillier, Edwin

John Mills, Joan Greenwood, Kay Walsh, Edward Chapman, Joyce Carey, Catherine Lacey, Felix Aylmer, Frederick Piper

Jim Acland (Mills) suffers a serious head injury in an accident in which a young girl (played by Mills' own daughter Juliet) accompanying him is killed. Jim is in hospital with some mental problems and a sense of guilt. A year later he has returned to "normal" life and is living in a hotel where he meets a young woman who, soon after, is murdered in nearby park. Jim is prime suspect... and perhaps, after all, he did actually do it?

Combines elements of film noir, the police procedural, and the psychological drama. From a script by Eric Ambler (who also produced), an early outing from director Roy Ward Baker (whose best film was **Don't Bother to Knock, 1952**). This is quite a tidy little thriller, distinguished by Mills' fine performance and by Hillier's camera work. It is not without a few problems: there's not really enough ambiguity in the plot-line to seriously ratchet up the tension. But it's a convincing portrayal of a man trying to deal with his own destabilized mental state. Mills is well supported by the other players though the characters are stock types.

Juliet Mills is still going in a long career which includes 94 screen credits in endless series TV series and not very good films. She's now 81. Her first "role" was as a baby (**In Which We Serve, 1942**).



ODD MAN OUT

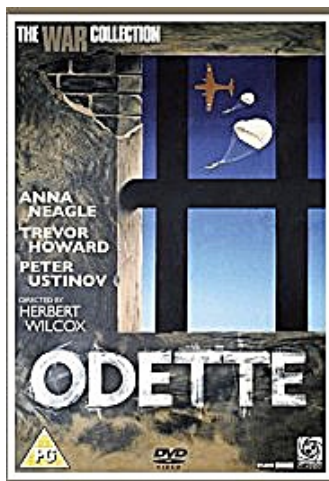
1947 Th 4.00 7.8 GB2

Reed, Carol

James Mason, Cyril Cusack,
Robert Newton, Kathleen Ryan,
WG Fay, FJ McCormick

Absorbing, moody suspense story of a IRA fugitive on the run, with some metaphysical overtones. The whole cast is excellent and the film is superbly shot in an atmospheric noirish style. Some Dickensian qualities in the depiction of the urban milieu (Belfast), the touch of the grotesque and the treatment of the characters' eccentricities. Effective shift from daylight realism to nocturnal dream. Occasionally gets too talky and the "message" too overt. The politics of the situation are left undeveloped. The narrative droops a bit in the second half. The trick photography sequences (such as the faces in the beer bubbles, and the reassembled paintings) are indeed too tricky. Carol Reed's first distinguished film and a forerunner to **The Fallen Idol**, **The Man Between** and **The Third Man**. Also a breakout film for James Mason. (His Irish accent is a lot better than his French!)

Odd Man Out was Polanski's favourite film! How's that work?



ODETTE

1950 A 3.50 7.1 GB2

Wilcox, Herbert

Mutz Greenbaum

Anna Neagle, Trevor Howard,
Marius Goring, Bernard Lee,
Peter Ustinov

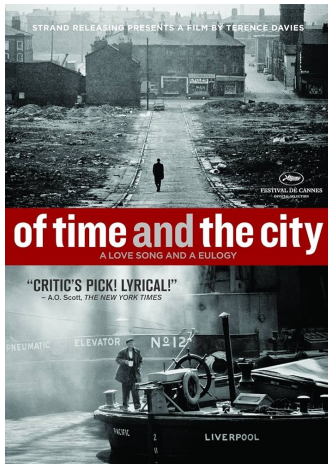
The exploits of a Frenchwoman, married to an Englishman, who returned to France during the war to carry out undercover work. The credits and intro rather clumsily contain a couple of spoilers, including the fact that Odette was captured and tortured. I read Jerrard Tickell's book about Odette when I was at school and found it exciting and inspiring. Unfortunately the film-makers have managed to make less of her story than they might have. The first half is on the sluggish side but the last 45 minutes achieve some dramatic intensity. The film has been dismissed by the few critics who have bothered to write about it. I thought the second half made it worthwhile.

Odd how a film in which Ravensbruck plays a significant role should make no mention of the Jews.

Lewis Gilbert's **Carve Her Name with Pride** (1958) told a similar story about a real-life English woman who married a Frenchman, and who worked for the French underground, was captured, tortured and, unlike Odette, executed. Virginia McKenna played the lead role.

Anna Neagle married director Herbert Wilcox in 1943. They made a number of films together. None of Wilcox's films were distinguished.

Odette divorced Peter Churchill in 1956.



OF TIME AND THE CITY

2008 DC 4.00 7.3 GB

Davies, Terence

Terence Davies' love-hate song to his native city, Liverpool, blending archival and contemporary footage, poetic and philosophical excerpts and Davies' semi-autobiographical monologue. Some of the juxtapositions of sound and image are tremendously daring, imaginative, and powerful. The film also evokes Liverpool's place in the mercantile, industrial and imperial history of England as well as depicting the horrors of the slums and industrial wastelands. As a film about Liverpool and a particular period in its history it is quite superb. As a platform for Davies' often sour ruminations and portentous pontifications it is frequently irritating, sometimes smug and self-important. He is variously bilious, spiteful, curmudgeonly and pompous. Davies strikes me as a fellow who is undoubtedly blessed with formidable intelligence, sensitivity and imagination but he's also convinced he's much more important than he really is! (His whole filmic career is a very long exercise in autobiography — really Terry, get a grip man!)

A difficult film to rate: the best of it is quite marvellous and the rest, well...



OFFICIAL SECRETS

2019 PT 3.75 7.3 GB2

Hood, Gavin

Florian Hoffmeister

Keira Knightley, Ralph Fiennes,
Matt Smith, Adam Bakri

London, 2003. True story of a whistleblower who leaked Top Secret information about the joint USA-UK efforts to intimidate/bribe/blackmail UN delegates to the Security Council in order to secure the passage of a resolution which would legitimize Bush-Blair's determination to wage war on Iraq — a war that turned out to be quite disastrous. The whistleblower is brought to trial... Three strands to the story: Katharine Gun's decision to leak a document and the subsequent turmoil in her life; the spotty role of the press in both UK and USA; the legal defence. The film is reasonably well-crafted though some of the dialogue sounds contrived and too intent on an explicit hammering home of the message. Nonetheless, the story is engrossing and the film has considerable impact. Yet another reminder — though one is hardly needed — of the entirely cynical and duplicitous means by which the American and British administrations "justified" the Iraq War of 2003. (Of course John Howard could be relied on to do his bit in propagating the fiction of Saddam's WMD's.)



OLD OAK, THE

2023 D 3.75 7.1 GB

Loach, Ken

Robbie Ryan

Dave Turner, Ebla Mari, Claire
Rodgers, Trevor Fox, Jake
Jarratt

Northeastern England, 2016. Small down-at-heel village, formerly a mining centre but now a dying town with low community morale, has become a dumping ground for Syrian refugees. Rapacious corporate vultures are taking advantage of the depressed circumstances. Some of the townsfolk are sympathetic to the newcomers but others are hostile, fuelled by ignorance, prejudice and some understandable resentments. The local pub owner finds himself, uncomfortably, at the centre of the various currents swirling around in the community. He strikes up a friendship with a young Syrian woman... Can the community as a whole find some common purpose and identity?

The narrative situation and the social themes are altogether Loachian. It's well mounted, nicely paced, adorned with convincing performances (especially by Dan Turner and Ebla Mari, the two leads, both non-professional actors in their debut features!!) and develops its themes without descending into polemics. A thoughtful, intelligent and heartfelt film, the last in a loose trilogy, preceded by **I, Daniel Blake** and **Sorry We Missed You**, all scripted by Paul Laverty. A harsh critic might cavil about a somewhat predictable narrative trajectory and a conventional style of film-making. The up-beat ending was perhaps a little too reassuring. But I found it a worthwhile watch and a fitting end to Loach's long career.



OLIVER TWIST

1948 D 4.75 7.8 GB

Lean, David

Guy Green

John Howard Davies, Alec Guinness, Robert Newton, Kay Walsh, Anthony Newley, Francis Sullivan

A wonderful adaptation of Dickens' novel about innocence violated, crime, poverty and class in 19thC London. Catches much of the drama, comedy, and sentiment of the book if not quite the dramatic intensity. (Nancy's murder in the book is positively Dostoevskian.) Magnificent opening, almost as good as that of **Great Expectations** (church graveyard). Eight-year-old John Howard Davies was an inspired choice as Oliver while all the cast are excellent. Guinness manages to make Fagin the complex character he is in the book (not simply a monster of evil as many of the critics want to see him). A young Anthony Newley plays the Artful Dodger and a young Diana Dors has a small part. The dog is a star! Splendid expressionistic sets and cinematography (Guy Green). Comparisons with **Great Expectations** are inevitable: both very fine but perhaps this one just gets the nod. (**GE** has the more elevated reputation.) Lean: *I imagined Great Expectations as a fairy tale, just not quite true, and Oliver Twist as a grimly realistic study of what poverty was like at the time... The main problem was that of making fantastic, larger than life characters fit into a starkly real setting.* (A problem well solved!) No doubt the novel has anti-Semitic strains which are toned down in the film.

Kay Walsh, at that time David Lean's wife, came up with the idea for the opening scene (which is not in the novel). The plot contrivances seem much less of a problem in the film than in the book. Fagin's appearance was modelled on Cruickshank's original illustrations of the novel. Controversy about the novel/film's anti-Semitism delayed the release of the film in the USA for three years. 12 minutes were cut out — since restored. There is absolutely no verbal reference to Fagin's Jewishness (although the beak nose is a stereotypical tell-tale). The film was banned in Israel. John Howard Davies did very little acting and became a TV producer (*Fawlty Towers* being one of his productions).



ONE OF OUR AIRCRAFT ...

1942 A 3.75 7.1 GB2

Powell, M & EP

Hugh Williams, Googie Withers,
Eric Portman, Bernard Miles,
Godfrey Tearle

The WW2 story, concerning six airmen who bail out over Holland and are helped in their escape by Dutch patriots, is nothing special but the film is elevated by superb cinematography (Ronald Neame), crisp editing (Lean), efficient direction and solid performances all round. (Cameos by a very young Peter Ustinov and by Robert Helpman). The sequences in the bomber are particularly impressive, as is the church scene. No musical soundtrack.

Not as interesting or as innovative as **49th Parallel** but an accomplished work nonetheless.



ORDERS TO KILL

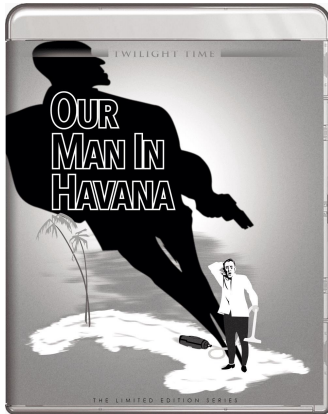
1958 A 4.00 7.1 GB2

Asquith, Anthony

Desmond Dickinson

Eddie Albert, Paul Massie, Lillian Gish, Irene Worth, James R Justice, Leslie French

Young air force pilot is sent into Nazi-occupied Paris to terminate a rogue operative. Starts off as a regulation wartime adventure film but turns into something more complex, more searching, more interesting when the protagonist is confronted by some of the moral ambiguities of his mission. It's neatly put together and works up into a tense and thoughtful drama. Irene Worth brings a bit of sting to her role (the whole cast is pretty good). The first ten minutes were clunky while the final segment after the killing meanders a little and dissipates the impact of the fatal act. This film deserves to be rescued from critical neglect (two skimpy pieces only on MRQE, one of them a faintly sneering and condescending review by Bozza; the IMDb rating is a healthy 7.1).



OUR MAN IN HAVANA

1959 C 4.25 7.3 GB

Reed, Carol

Oswald Morris

Alec Guinness, Maureen O'Hara,
Ernie Kovacs, Noel Coward,
Ralph Richardson, Jo Morrow,
Burl Ives

Imagine this: an admixture of Ealing comedy, a noir suspenser, espionage thriller, and a dash of Monty Python. Graham Greene and Carol Reed are the Mix-Masters of this spoof/black comedy/absurdist drama. Or try this: a Graham Greene "entertainment" garnished with reminiscences of **The Third Man**, **The Man in the White Suit** and **Touch of Evil**. It's an odd but engaging mix. Cuba, 1950s. Vacuum cleaner salesman inadvertently finds himself involved in the spy business, getting mixed up with a low-level spymaster-cum-dandy (Coward), an eccentric German expatriate (Ives), a corrupt police chief (Kovacs) and a smashingly beautiful agent (O'Hara). A Who's Who cast. Guinness plays the role with a superb blend of irony, parody and pathos; Maureen O'Hara and Ernie Kovacs are wonderful; Burl Ives proves again to be an actor of some substance, so to speak, even if his "German" accent is a problem. Shot on location after possible complications arising from the revolution: Castro was actually a friend of Greene and visited the set. Splendid cinematography by Oswald Morris.

Greene is perhaps poking fun at himself, and Reed certainly is. Greene and Reed had already collaborated on **The Fallen Idol** and **The Third Man**; whilst this film isn't in that class, it carries some of the same hallmarks. Greene actually anticipates some of the themes and the mood of *Le Carré*. This is usually categorized as a comedy but that won't quite do. If it was only a comedy it wouldn't be particularly good. It's a pity Reed's reputation seems to be restricted to his 1940s films: this, like **Outcast of the Islands**, is a neglected gem — a small gem perhaps, but valuable nonetheless. I'm a sucker for anything by Greene, and to a lesser degree, anything by Reed (and Maureen O'Hara helped too!). I enjoyed it hugely but I well understand that not everybody would.



OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS

1951 D 4.25 7.2 GB

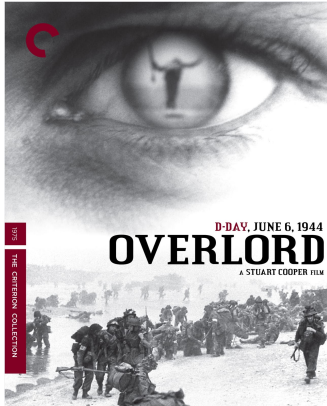
Reed, Carol

Edward Scaife

Trevor Howard, Ralph
Richardson, Kerima, Wendy
Hiller, Robert Morley, Wilfred
Hyde White

Lust and Madness in the Tropics. Taken from Conrad's steamy novel about a man's moral disintegration, destroyed by greed and lust; the thing is given some pathos by the fact that he had the seed of love within him but it was rendered barren by his weakness. Willems also embodies certain more noble possibilities — set off by the mediocre Almayer. There's an old salt of a sea captain (Richardson), a lazy and opportunistic trader (Morley) and his unhappy wife (Wendy Hiller), some disgruntled natives and the mysterious and alluring daughter of the chief. Some of the more interesting undercurrents are only treated obliquely — eg. the predicament of Mrs Almayer, or the relationship of Willems and the young boy, or the father-daughter motif — as is the imperial theme. It's dark and pretty bleak with the only warmth and joy being provided by the village children who figure in several delightful if fleeting scenes. (The apparently benevolent figure of Lingard is actually quite ambiguous; he may have just a touch of Kurtz about him.) There are aspects of Conrad's complex and dense novel which scriptwriter William Fairchild couldn't manage. Not sure that RR was the right man to play Lingard; he belongs on an English stage, not the jungles of the Far East.

The first film Reed made after **The Third Man**: not what the people or the critics were wanting and expecting, which partially accounts for its poor reception. The film has gradually built a reputation. I think it's a fine piece of work: intelligent, engrossing, intense, visually inventive (though much less flamboyant than **The Third Man**), and anchored in Howard's impressive performance amidst the carefully observed exotic locale. Conrad is notoriously difficult to adapt to the screen. On the whole I think this brave project was well achieved. Where did they find a child that looked like Robert Morley?: they used his own daughter. Kerima (Aissa) was French-Algerian. Mostly shot in Sri Lanka. This version seems to be missing about six minutes — no idea what material is AWOL.



OVERLORD

1975 A 5.00 7.2 GB2

Cooper, Stuart

John Alcott

Brian Stirner, Julie Neesam, Sam Sewell, Davyd Harries

Stuart Cooper's long-neglected 1975 film is an extraordinary synthesis of archival footage and fictional wartime drama tracking the fate of Everyman-Soldier. It draws on prodigious archival research which is seamlessly integrated into the fictional drama, and is shot with wartime stock and lenses to achieve a feel of authenticity. (Cinematography by Kubrick collaborator John Alcott.) Blends humour, pathos and graphic footage to achieve a powerful depiction of the appalling ravages of war on the landscape, the cities, the culture of Europe and on the millions of people caught up in a nightmare of death and destruction. The fantastic, bizarre and grotesque aspects of war are caught in recurrent images of strange, diabolical devices and surreal aerial sequences. Brian Stirner and Julie Neesham are wonderful as the would-be lovers; their relationship is handled with some delicacy. Evocative score by Paul Glass.

The film is not message-burdened or strident, nor does it linger on the hideous violence of war, making it all the more potent in its portrayal of what war (justified or not) is really all about. It stands in the frontline of war films (**King and Country**, **Paths of Glory**, **Germany Year Zero** and the like.) How could such a film remain neglected for so long??

I was surprised to discover that Cooper is an expat American. He has worked mainly in television.



PAINTED VEIL, THE

2006 D 3.50 7.5 GB

Curran, John

Edward Norton, Naomi Watts,
Toby Jones, Diana Rigg, Live
Schrieber

1920s Rural China. Young English scientist/doctor and his wife arrive in China after a hasty and ill-considered marriage. Adultery, revenge, political unrest, cholera epidemic, nuns, small children... and then what? Based on a Somerset Maugham novel which is less misanthropic and cynical than much of his fare; the narrative trajectory is rather the reverse of what we might expect. It's a character-driven, well-acted, well-dressed, slightly overblown, occasionally tedious, earnest and self-important film about a journey of self-discovery in a terrible and exotic environment. Diana Rigg plays a nun — I'm serious! Filmed in China (even the London scenes, which were filmed in Shanghai); some very seductive visuals although at times it veers towards the postcard/tour brochure. Possibly Naomi Watts' finest performance. The secondary political theme is given very perfunctory treatment. I quite enjoyed it... but it lacks grip. Several critics described it as "deeply moving": I didn't find it so though the ending was not without some effect. Oscar bait (in which aspiration it was a complete failure).



PANDORA & F.DUTCHMAN

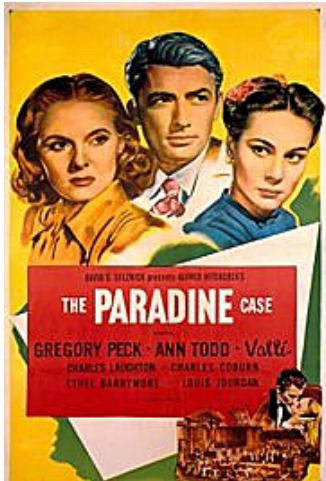
1950 M 4.25 7.0 GB

Lewin, Albert

Jack Cardiff

James Mason, Ava Gardner,
Nigel Patrick, Harold Warrender,
Sylvia Sim, Mario Cabré, Marius
Goring

Ava is a nightclub singer holidaying on the Spanish coast. Men are infatuated with her, moths around a flame, an English racing car driver (Patrick) and a Spanish matador (Cabré) among them. She remains aloof and apparently heartless. A solitary yacht is moored in the bay, its captain (Mason) a solitary, enigmatic and troubled character. The story of a strange romance ensues, narrated by an English archaeologist (sounding remarkably like George Sanders who would have been fine in the role). The story is an enchanting blend of myth, legend, fable, morality play and unbridled Romanticism, filmed in lush Technicolor by camera maestro Jack Cardiff. Script by Lewin, (an adaptation, obviously, of the Flying Dutchman legend). The cast is competent enough but they are all put in the shade by a radiant Ava G who brings an unexpected tenderness and some subtlety to the role, along with her more familiar attributes as Screen Goddess. Plenty of colour and movement and Spanish exoticism — the coast, car racing, archaeological ruins, Tarot cards, flamenco, bull fighting. It could easily have all turned pretty silly, tawdry and lurid ... but it doesn't, in large measure thanks to Gardner (this must surely be one of her finest hours) and Cardiff. It has something of the bewitching quality of the Powell-Pressburger mix of the romantic, the mythic and the mystical, and much of the film, thanks partly to Cardiff's camera work, is reminiscent of films such as **Black Narcissus**, **The Red Shoes**, **I Know Where I'm Going** and even **Gone to Earth**. Overall Lewin does a fine job but with Powell-Pressburger at the helm, well, who knows! (Cardiff shot **Black Narcissus**, **The Red Shoes**, **Under Capricorn**, **The Barefoot Contessa** and **War and Peace** — all had a certain "Cardiff look".) Lewin was responsible for the under-rated and neglected **The Picture of Dorian Gray** (1945). His other films — few — seem to have been duds though **The Private Affairs of Bel Ami** (1947) sounds vaguely interesting and one wonders what he did with Maugham's **The Moon and Sixpence** (1942).



PARADINE CASE, THE

1947 D 3.75 6.5 GB

Hitchcock, Alfred

Lee Garmes

Gregory Peck, Alida Valli, Ann Todd, Louis Jourdan, Charles Laughton, Charles Coburn

Combination of melodrama and courtroom drama with a touch of Victorian Gothic, made under the lavish aegis of David (“spare no expense”) Selznick, a kind of companion piece to **Rebecca**. Alida Valli and Louis Jourdan are the best performers, bringing some intensity and zip (Peck and Todd both being rather bland); Laughton does his schtick as a corrupt and callous judge, with Leo Carroll and Ethel Barrymore in support roles. Some characteristic Hitchcockian motifs and themes — the ambiguous interplay of lust and love, the perversion of justice, the transfer of guilt — as well as his now characteristic aesthetic. Letour’s suicide is a somewhat clumsy *deus ex machina*. The last scene is pap. The film should have ended with Peck’s exit from the courtroom. (Ann Todd’s wife is far too good to be real.) Charles Coburn is not given much free rein, unfortunately. Peck and Jourdan are miscast, though both struggle manfully to give their best. Olivier and Ronald Colman were pursued for Peck’s role, but without success. Selznick wanted either Garbo or Bergman for the Alida Valli role but both declined. (I think Valli is actually perfect!) The film is talky but there’s also plenty of “looking” by both characters and camera. Hitch seems to have started his love-affair with the long take here. The Old Bailey set cost a small fortune. (The film only recouped about half of its costs.) Like **Dial M for Murder** and **Under Capricorn**, the film is better than its reputation (eg. one reviewer called it “Hitchcock’s weakest film” — really?) Despite its many apparent weaknesses it still offers the cinephile many pleasures. (It has suffered from Hitch’s own disdain for the film and from the inevitable comparisons with the dazzling work of the next decade.) Better, I think, than Billy Wilder’s much more widely-lauded **Witness for the Prosecution**.



PASSAGE HOME

1955 D 3.75 6.0 GB

Baker, Roy Ward

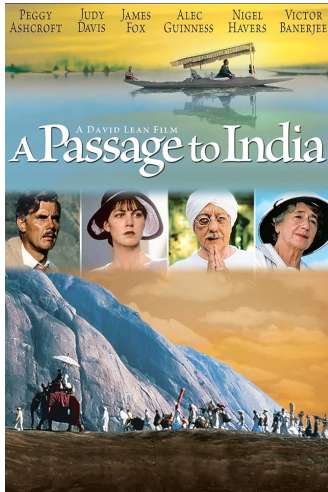
Geoffrey Unsworth

Peter Finch, Diane Cilento,
Anthony Steel, Hugh Griffiths,
Gordon Jackson, Geoffrey Keen,
Cyril Cusack

The Old Man, the Sea and Diane Cilento. Grumpy cargo-ship captain (Finch) is forced to take on a passenger (Cilento) and a bull for the long voyage from Paraguay back to England. Conditions aboard are not good, the potatoes are positively rotten, the weather is bad; the captain is not happy, the crew are not happy, and the bull probably isn't either. The chief engineer (Griffiths) tells us early on that ships and women are a bad mix — surprise!: so it turns out. Rumbblings amongst the motley crew (is mutiny threatening?), tensions amongst the officers, an ailing bosun, captain on the edge and hitting the bottle (is he going mad?).

Passage Home has been almost completely ignored and those that deign to notice it have dismissed it. Admittedly the story is full of generic clichés and the first half has an attack of doldrums inertia. But things crank up in the second half and a well-credentialed cast turn in very serviceable performances. Geoffrey Unsworth's cinematography attains some heights in the storm sequences, all shot in the studio! (It must also be said that the "rescue" of Cilento during the storm goes on for far too long.) The triangular romantic plot works well enough and I found the under-stated ending quite touching. I was a little restless in the first half but I found myself doing a fair bit of worrying — always a good sign — in the second.

Roy Ward Baker is one of the more interesting second-tier British directors. His credits include the excellent **Don't Bother to Knock** (52), and **A Night to Remember** (58). Later in his career he was sucked into the Hammer Horror vortex and ended up in the TV wasteland.



PASSAGE TO INDIA, A

1984 D 4.00 7.4 GB

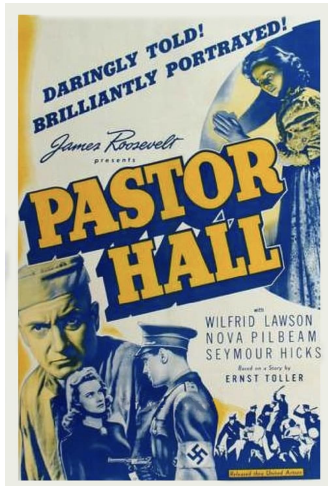
Lean, David

Ernest Day

Judy Davis, Peggy Ashcroft,
Victor Bannerjee, James Fox,
Alec Guinness, Nigel Havers

The Raj, 1924. Screen adaptation of EM Forster's marvellous novel about Empire, race, and the cultural abyss. Inevitably the film cannot capture all of the subtleties and ambiguities of the novel... it's difficult not to regret the fact. The film is a really commendable try: Judy Davis and Victor Bannerjee (from Ray's **The Chess Players**) are both splendid and the rest of the cast pretty good (except for the miscast Guinness); plenty of colourful spectacle balanced with some sensitive and intimate scenes; the sexual repression motif is intelligently handled but perhaps overstated; the film avoids the pitfalls of a too facile critique of English imperialism while still exposing its inherent racism; there is some delicate shading and some moral complexity in the treatment of both English and Indian characters. The film moves at a leisurely pace but remains entertaining throughout. But: Lean can't quite resist the temptations of pictorial grandiosity and a bloated and overlush score (Maurice Jarre); the film somewhat simplifies and thereby defuses the central puzzle of the novel (what really happened in the cave?); Godbole doesn't really come off — how regrettable that Lean didn't find an Indian to play the part.

Lean's real métier was the intimate drama and the close observation of "Englishness". His later epics, on the whole, are much lesser films than his early triumphs. But this is one of his better films in the Big Budget, Big Screen mode. This was his last film — not a bad epitaph.



PASTOR HALL

1940 D 3.75 7.3 GB

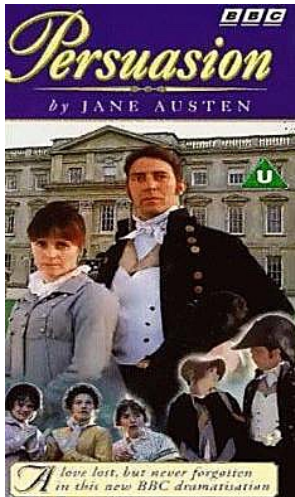
Boulting Bros

Mutz Greenbaumn

Wilfred Lawson, Nova Pilbeam,
Marius Goring, Bernard Miles,
Seymour Hicks, Brian Worth

Provincial Germany, 1934. Based on the story of Lutheran pastor in a small German town, Martin Neimöller who criticized the Nazi stormtroopers who were brutally enforcing the “New Order”. The script is built from the play by Ernest Toller. Apparently this was the first feature film in which mention was made of the Nazi concentration camps. It was held up by the censors during the Chamberlain appeasement era and not released until after the beginning of the war. The film takes a fair few liberties with the historical facts; it is essentially a morally-driven propaganda piece. In real life Neimöller was initially sympathetic to the Nazis and was something of an anti-Semite. He survived the war and became well-known in the West for his statement. *First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.*

The Boulting brothers can generally be relied out to turn out professional, well-crafted films; this is no exception. Lawson is excellent as Neimöller, played with some restraint but with plenty of voltage. Well supported by the rest of the cast though the treatment of the young girl who has been raped by a Nazi thug is a bit wobbly.



PERSUASION

1995 D 4.00 7.7 GB

Michell, Roger

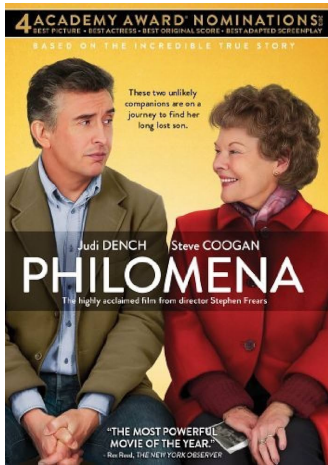
John Daly

Amanda Root, Ciarán Hinds,
Susan Fleetwood, Corinne
Redgrave, John Woodvine,
Sophie Thompson

Love lost, love's embers tended, love recovered. From Jane Austen's quietest, most poignant and perhaps most deeply felt novel; less sparkle and comedy, more pathos. This BBC adaptation eschews the pitfalls of the BBC screen adaptation — obsessive concern with period detail, an indulgence in the pretty and picturesque, and insufficient attention to Austen's moral concerns. The visuals are a bit murky — TV production values rather than the Big Budget treatment — and it lacks star-power. But generally it's nicely done with fine performances from Root (Anne) and Hinds (Wentworth), faithful (most of the time) to both the plot and the spirit of Austen's novel. This amounts to quite a lot. Judged in cinematic terms it's less impressive and suffers from the inevitable comparison with Ang Lee's glossy, sophisticated and powerful **Sense and Sensibility**, made in the same year, scripted by and starring Emma Thompson whose sister, Sophie, plays the awful Mary in this production. My most serious gripe with this film, along with the inferior production values, was some rather clumsy camera work, especially in the early sequences.

There are at least two other screen adaptations — the 2007 TV movie directed by Adrian Shergold and one which is still in production this year (2012), directed by Carrie Cracknell. Three Jane Austen novels and two films seen in the last six months. Time for a breather!

How ridiculous, and in many senses quite awful, were the minor English gentry of the period? (Nothing good came out of the 18thC!)



PHILOMENA

2013 D 4.00 7.6 GB

Frears, Stephen

Robbie Ryan

Judi Dench, Steve Coogan,
Sophie Kennedy Clark, Peter
Hermann, Cathy belton

Story (“inspired by real events”) about an elderly Irish woman trying to track down her lost son, taken from her as a baby, and her subsequent struggles with the nuns and others. Film hinges on her relationship with a journalist who takes a less forgiving view of the injustices and cruelties perpetrated by the church (about which even more hideous revelations have come to light in recent years). Material which might easily degenerate into tabloid goo/Kleenex fest but which is here treated in an intelligent, thoughtful and even-handed manner. The story is consistently engaging and there is a lot of humour as well as pathos. Dench and Coogan both excellent. A very likeable, entertaining and heartwarming film ... but perhaps a little too glossy. Looks a bit like an Oscar-chaser.

Stephen Frears is the man who gave us **Gumshoe** all those years ago (circa 1971), with Albert Finney. (Coogan is a latter-day Finney-look-alike and has something of his comedic gift. He co-wrote and produced.)



PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

1945 D 4.00 7.6 GB

Lewin, Albert

Harry Stradling

Hurd Hatfield, George Sanders,
Donna Reed, Angela Lansbury,
Peter Lawford

Oscar Wilde's fascinating, creepy, melodramatic novel about a man who sells his soul brought to the screen in an intelligent but somewhat unimaginative adaptation, but the story is so compelling that it carries the day (or should that be night?). Hurd Hatfield (handsome, charming and icy) was a splendid choice for the lead and Sanders is perfect as the Wildean Lord Henry. Lush MGM production values and accomplished cinematography by Harry Stradling — but the story demanded more expressionist treatment. Faustian reverberations. Edwardian London, elegant high society, a hideous underworld, decadence and foul play, embellished with Wilde's wit: the perfect ingredients for a *fin-de-siècle* melodrama of a superior and disturbing kind.

Peter Lawford is about as wooden as it gets, and Lowell Gilmore isn't quite up to it. A bit talky and stagey.

Given added piquancy and poignancy in the light of Oscar Wilde's fate. Very fertile ground for the psychoanalysts! A morality play and in some ways Oscar's *mea culpa*. The gay sub-text is pretty close to the surface.

I saw this at boarding school at the age of about 14 and was quite disturbed by it; I still am!

There have been at least seven film/TV adaptations of Wilde's novel. Hurd Hatfield (who was gay) regretted the role which he claimed ruined his career.



PIMPERNEL SMITH

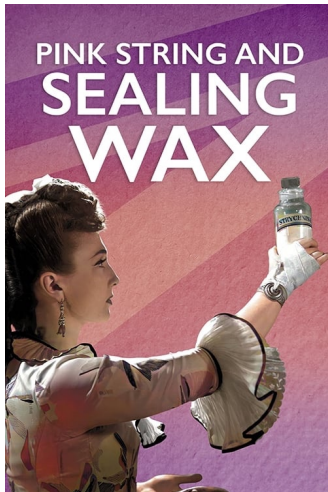
1941 A 3.50 7.2 GB2

Howard, Leslie

Mutz Greenbaum

Leslie Howard, Francis Sullivan,
May Morris, Raymond Huntley

A reworking of the Scarlet Pimpernel story transposed to WW2, a tale of espionage, subterfuge and a battle of wits with the principal adversaries being a mild-mannered Cambridge don (Howard) and an obese Gestapo general (Sullivan). The narrative turns on an elaborate plan to rescue a Polish journalist. The Gestapo have lured the journalist's daughter back to Germany and she is caught in the middle of a game of cat-and-mouse. The story is routine WW2 stuff but Sullivan and Howard give it some wit and sparkle as well as a small dose of tension; pedestrian as a wartime thriller but a fine showcase for these two. Howard brings tremendous off-hand panache to his role. The Cambridge students, on the other hand, are pretty wet. The fact that all the Nazis speak in the best Cambridge accents is also disconcerting. (I guess German-speaking actors might have been in short supply just at that moment.) The professor's final spiel about the fate awaiting Germany and the Nazis is actually quite impressive — and no doubt heartfelt on Howard's part. Certainly more convincing than Sherlock Holmes' soliloquies at the end of the wartime SH films though Basil always did his best. A pretty average print. Leslie Howard — seemingly the quintessential Englishman — was born of Hungarian Jewish parents, fought in WW1 and was deeply traumatized but found a means of escape in acting. His directing isn't as elegant as his acting! He died in 1943 when the plane in which he was travelling was shot down by German fighters over the Bay of Biscay. Humphrey Bogart named his daughter Leslie in his honour (they had worked together on **The Petrified Forest** and Howard had been immensely helpful).



PINK STRING & SEALING

1945 D 3.50 6.6 GB

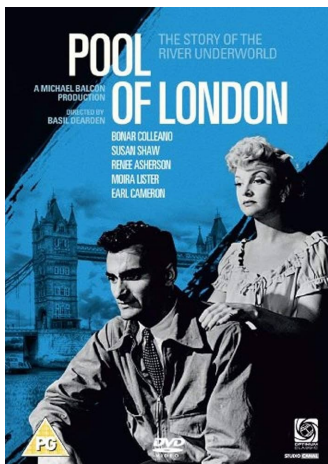
Hamer, Robert

Stanley Pavey

Mervyn Johns, Googie Withers,
Gordon Jackson, Jean Ireland,
Garry Marsh

Brighton, Victorian times. Googie Withers, *femme fatale* extraordinaire, does away with her drunken and abusive husband. The son (Jackson) of a straight-laced bourgeois family is enticed into her web. Papa (Johns) is not amused. Stagey and rather conventional play-derived studio film (Ealing) which is enlivened by fine performances (especially from Googie in a role tailor-made for her), some dark and off-beat humour, and effective atmospherics. Lots of pub scenes interwoven with a picture of oppressive domestic rectitude. Several thematic threads are left lying loose. Some signs of things to come from the highly creative, idiosyncratic and ill-starred Hamer.

What kind of name is "Googie" for a gal anyway?



POOL OF LONDON

1951 Th 4.00 7.2 GB2

Dearden, Basil

Gordon Dines

Bonnar Calleano, Earl Cameron,
Moira Lister, Renéé Asherson,
Susan Shaw, James Robertson
Justice, Max Adrian

Ships, docks, diamonds, heist, smuggling, murder, police chases, bars, nocturnal streets, theatres. Ostensibly a crime drama — which works quite well — but also a study of the London Docklands sub-culture. Dearden was a long way ahead of the pack in the evolution of several strains in the British cinema: the police procedural with a semi-documentary feel, the sociological depiction of the less glamorous aspects of London/English life, the exploration of such more or less taboo subjects as racism and homosexuality, the kitchen-sinkers' interest in the working class. These elements are nicely synthesized in **Pool of London**. Now seen enough of Dearden to recognize him as one of the major talents of the postwar British cinema. Consider: **The Captive Heart** (46), **The Blue Lamp** (50), **Pool of London** (51), **The Ship that Died of Shame** (55), **Sapphire** (59), **The League of Gentlemen** (60), **Victim** (61). Not far behind Powell, Lean and Reed!

Dearden died in a motor accident in 1971, aged 60.

This was one of the earliest films which gave a black actor a leading role, in this case Earl Cameron who was to reappear as the doctor in **Sapphire** and who had a long career in film and television. Cameron was still going in 2013 when he was awarded a CBE; if he still hasn't gone to the Other Side Camp, he must now be 99.

Gordon Dines: **The Blue Lamp**, **The Cruel Sea**, **The Colditz Story**.

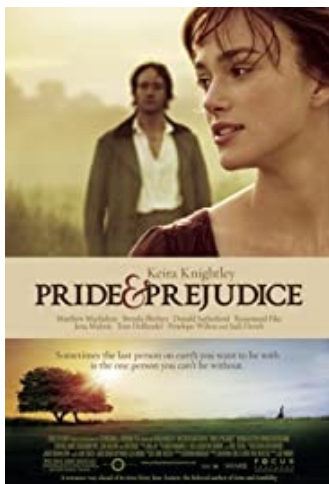


PORTRAIT OR BUST

1994 DC 4.00 7.4 GB

Bennett, Alan/BBC

Alan Bennett ruminates on art, Leeds, life... another in the BBC series. AB has a gift for eavesdropping — both literally and metaphorically — and here he unobtrusively slinks about the Leeds Art Gallery, interweaving his childhood memories with his adult ponderings and the murmurings of art gallery patrons. He also has his portrait painted. It's quiet, low-key, often amusing, always interesting.



PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

2005 D 4.00 7.8 GB

Wright, Joe

Roman Osin

Keira Knightley, Rosamund Pike,
Matthew MacFadyen, Simon
Woods, Donald Sutherland, Judi
Dench

Yet another sumptuous costume drama adaptation of Austen's much-loved classic about class, money, marriage and romance, centering on the apparently thwarted romances of two of the Bennett sisters Jane (Pike) and Lizzie (Knightley), and the surly and enigmatic Mr Darcy. Austen requires a very light and deft touch and, in the main, the film delivers. I am not a big fan of either Knightley or Pike but I must say they both do a fine job here as do Simon Woods (Mr Bingley), Donald Sutherland (Mr Bennett) and Brenda Blethyn (Mrs Bennett). Macfadyen (Darcy) is perhaps a little out of his depth but the ensemble acting is generally excellent. It's all very BBC and none the worse for that.

I can only take Austen — on the page or on the screen — in small doses but this actually went down very well.

Emma Thompson (uncredited) helped out with the dialogue. I must give the 1995 **Sense and Sensibility** (Ang Lee) a look.



PRIME OF MISS JEAN B

1969 M 3.75 7.6 GB

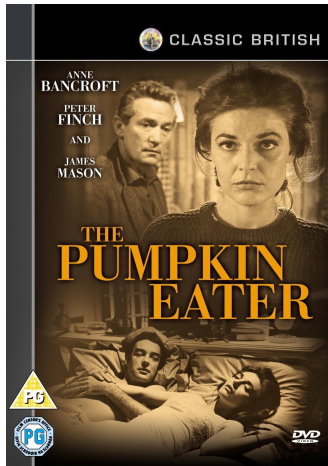
Neame, Ronald

Ted Moore

Maggie Smith, Robert Stephens,
Celia Johnson, Gordon Jackson,
Pamela Franklin

Edinburgh, 1930s, conservative girls' school. MJB is a teacher nearing the end of her prime: she's high-minded, strong willed, inspirational, a lover of art, music and literature, quite "progressive" in some of her attitudes; she's also sentimental, repressed, naive and authoritarian. Muriel Spark's novel and the subsequent play and film explore JB's complex relations with her students and colleagues, particularly the straight-laced principal (Johnson), the caddish art teacher and pants-man (Stephens), a decent but dull music master (Jackson) and four impressionable young girls. Spark's novel is smart, witty, unpredictable, sometimes malicious, satirically barbed, deftly written. The film, on the other hand, is directed in rather plodding style by journeyman Neame but is given some Spark by Maggie Smith who won the Oscar for her efforts — which now look a trifle mannered and overplayed despite the brio she brings to it. It took me quite a while to get interested and I was never fully hooked. The final confrontation between JB and the "spy" doesn't have the sting it should. Troubled and slightly crazy teachers in a repressive environment? Rattigan did it better (and so did Asquith) in **The Browning Version**. This one, while not without some edge, was a little disappointing; I was expecting something better.

Looking over Ronald Neame's very grey CV one suspects that this and **Tunes of Glory** (60) were his best.



PUMPKIN EATER, THE

1964 D 4.50 7.4 GB

Clayton, Jack

Oswald Morris

Anne Bancroft, Peter Finch,
James Mason, Maggie Smith,
Cecil Hardwicke

England, early 60s. Jo (Bancroft) has eight children and is on her third marriage, this time to Jake (Finch), a successful screen writer and incorrigible pants-man. Character study of a woman who's on the edge and portrait of a marriage riven with unspoken tensions. The film is very much of its period: the influence of the European avant-garde (Antonioni in particular), the highly literate script by Harold Pinter from Penelope Mortimer's novel, a hint of the next wave of feminism just round the corner, the ambivalent attitude to psychiatry (RD Laing et al). Oswald Morris' early 60s arthouse cinematography is marvellous. **PE** presents a very sympathetic rendering of a rather confused woman; a wonderful performance by Anne Bancroft who manages to express a great deal with very little (a contrast to her sassy performance in Ford's **7 Women**). Finch and Mason provide excellent support: Mason gives a delightfully mannered performance, Finch more understated and subtle. Our sympathies and identifications become quite complex. The film nicely conveys the mayhem of a large family. Like many Pinter-scripted films it's kinda bleak but there is nothing here of the corrosive cynicism and nastiness that mars some of his work. It puts one in mind of the Losey-Pinter collaborations, most notably **The Servant**; this is a much more agreeable if less powerful film. I like its open-ended treatment of some awkward subjects. Dennis Schwartz reproached the film for its "soap opera roots" — a spectacularly ill-advised observation: "soap opera" is exactly what it isn't! Anne Bancroft is a kind of half-way house between Ruth Roman and Susan Sontag. I'm a massive fan. Jack Clayton is a monstrously under-rated director. He only made seven features but at least four of them are films of very high calibre: **Room at the Top**, **The Innocents**, **The Pumpkin Eater**, **Our Mother's House** (the last not seen since the late 60s). (The BFI list of the 100 best British Films includes only **Room at the Top**, at 32, which is about twenty spots too low.)



PYGMALION

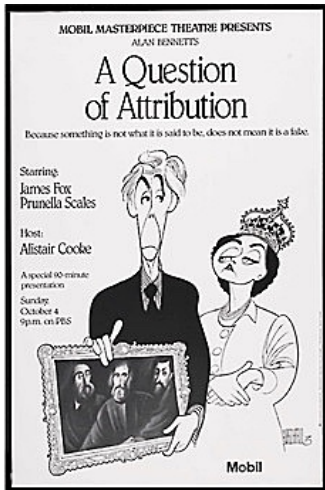
1938 D 4.00 7.9 GB

Asquith, Anthony

Harry Stradling Sr

Wendy Hiller, Leslie Howard,
Wilfred Lawson, Marie Lohr, Scott
Sunderland

GB Shaw adapted his own wildly successful play for the screen, here tastefully directed by Anthony Asquith and marvellously played by the two leads, Howard and Hiller, the latter in her first major screen role. This fine film, unhappily, has been rather overshadowed by George Cukor's mega-budget musical, **My Fair Lady**, with Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison which won a truckload of Oscars. I haven't seen **My Fair Lady** for well over fifty years but it's hard to imagine that I would like it as much as this more faithful (non-musical!) version of GBS' play about the transformation of a Cockney flower-girl into a "lady", and the more subtle transformation of Henry Higgins into a more human character. Hiller doesn't have Hepburn's gamine charm but she is very engaging, and Howard is so much more congenial an actor than Rex Harrison. As one reviewer observed, *this is classic Asquith—superior performances, strong narrative, polished look*. And let's tip the hat to Harry Stradling's splendid camerawork. Good as Howard and the rest of the cast are, it's Hiller's film. Ostensibly this is a light comedy but it has some sharp social commentary and some dark shadows, perhaps more evident in Shaw's original version of the play in which Eliza marries Freddie, turning her back on Higgins. (There is an admixture of misogyny and a sort of proto-feminism in both play and film; not an uncommon phenomenon.) GBS wanted Charles Laughton for the lead role. I'll take L Howard any day.



QUESTION OF ATTRIBUTION

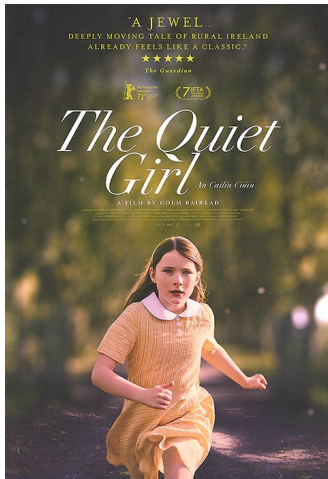
1991 PT 4.00 7.8 GB2

Schlesinger, John

James Fox, Geoffrey Palmer,
Prunella Scales, David Calder

Written by Alan Bennett and filmed for BBC TV, this is a clever if somewhat over-schematized play about “fakes”, “forgeries” and “attribution”. As we would expect of Bennett, it’s highly literate, witty, and ironic, and deserved the considerable talents of director Schlesinger and lead actor James Fox (who, appropriately, plays Anthony Blunt as an enigma). But the best thing is Prunella Scales priceless cameo as the Queen and her exchange with Blunt in the Palace: it’s brilliant! I enjoyed this hugely... but I’m not sure how it would go down with viewers not already familiar with the whole bizarre story of Blunt et al.

Not as good as its companion piece, **An Englishman Abroad**, also directed by Schlesinger.



QUIET GIRL, THE

2022 D 4.25 7.7 IRE

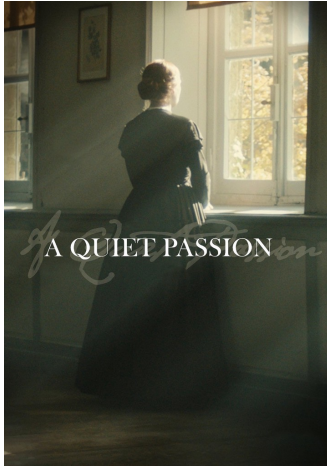
Bairéad, Colm

Kate McCullough

Carrie Crowley, Andrew Bennett,
Catherine Clinton, Michael Patric,
Kate Nic Chonaonaigh, Joan
Sheehy

Cait is one of several children in a poverty-stricken household in rural Ireland, a worn-out mother and a loutish father. Yet another baby is on the way. A childless couple, distant relations, offer to look after Cait for the summer. Here she slowly finds herself enveloped in love... but alas, it must all come to an end. A story full of unspoken grief, pain and anxiety, callous neglect, but also tender love. The twelve-year old Catherine Clinch gives a wondrous debut performance, strongly supported by the other two leads.

A muted drama in which restraint is the keynote – in tone, treatment, dialogue, performance, style. Closely observed, unhurried and, in the end, deeply moving. In all this it is unfaltering in its fidelity to Claire Keegan's exquisite novella, *Foster*. Both the book and film (a directorial debut) are of a kind all too rare in recent times.



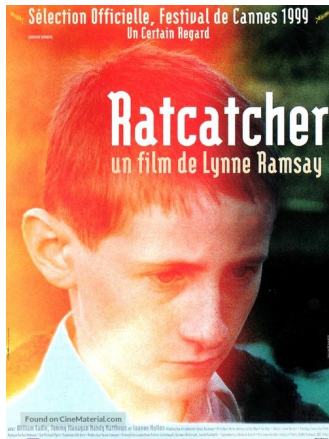
QUIET PASSION, A

2016 D 4.00 6.4 GB

Davies, Terence

Cynthia Nixon, Jennifer Ehle,
Keith Carradine, Duncan Duff,
Catherine Bailey

An imagined reconstruction of the outer and inner life of reclusive poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), told with an oblique feminist accent, and both scripted and directed by Terence Davies. Its filmed as a chamber piece in stately, austere and painterly fashion, only intermittently revealing the submerged turbulence. And as usual, there is some haunting music (especially that played over the closing credits.) Along the way there are ruminations about the position of women, the vocation of the artist, the cramping constrictions of New England Puritanism, sexual repression, scepticism, isolation, illness, melancholia, madness, death. The narrative is embroidered with Nixon's voice-over reciting passages from Dickinson's poetry. The performances derive much of their power from restraint and nuance, and from the film's refusal to evade the contradictions and enigmas in the lives of the characters. Davies resists the temptations of Ivory-style pictorialism and latter-day political posturing to produce a complex human drama. It doesn't have quite the depth, richness and force of **The House of Mirth** and his better "autobiographical" films but it's a fine achievement nonetheless. No doubt some viewers will find it slow, too "literary", too "arty" and boring. I didn't.



RATCATCHER

1999 D 3.50 7.5 GB

Ramsay, Lynne

William Eadie, Tommy Flanagan,
Mandy Matthews, Michelle
Stewart, Leanne Mullen

1973, Glasgow slums during a garbage strike. Grime, grunge, grot. Story centres on a 12-year old boy who has been traumatized by the drowning of his friend, and troubled by the squalid conditions in which his family lives. Poverty, drugs, violence, gangs, lice ... and lots of rats. A brutally direct treatment of a subject we'd rather not know about, more or less relentlessly bleak with just a few lyrical moments. About halfway between Ken Loach and Terence Davies in his more gloomy mode with a touch of the wannabe-Terrence Malicks. The film caused a fair bit of excitement when it appeared and garnered a lot of critical praise. I found it gruelling but not all that involving.



RED SHOES, THE

1949 D 4.00 8.3 GB

Powell & Pressburger

Jack Cardiff

Moira Shearer, Anton Walbrook,
Marius Goring, Robert Helpman

An emerging young ballet dancer, mentored by a great director, must eventually choose between Art and Love. Sumptuous and graceful in every possible respect, and adorned with wonderful performances. Powell-Pressburger give us a characteristic mix of fantasy, fairy tale and realism, and there are plenty of dark elements in a very heady brew. A film full of subtleties, ambiguities, provocations and disturbances as well as some more obvious aesthetic and emotional satisfactions.

RS has become a canonical text which is almost universally admired, and one of the most celebrated of all British films. I've always anticipated I'd have trouble with a film about ballet — and I did. I found the long ballet sequence in the middle boring as. Sometimes it's better to just straight out confess: as far as ballet goes I'm a philistine. I appreciate this film's very considerable merits but I much prefer several other Powell-Pressburgers — certainly **Edge of the World**, **Col. Blimp**, **Black Narcissus**, and probably **I Know Where I'm Going** and **A Canterbury Tale** as well.



REMAINS OF THE DAY

1993 D 4.50 7.9 GB

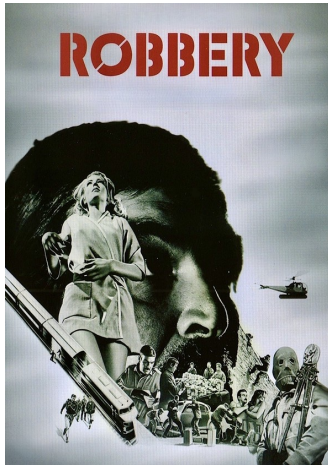
Ivory, James

Tony Pierce-Roberts

Anthony Hopkins, Emma Thompson, James Fox, Hugh Grant, Christopher Reeve

1930s England. "Upper Class" society. War approaching. The story centres on an old-school butler (Hopkins in one of his best screen roles) whose soul is slowly corroded by his lifelong loyalty to his aristocratic employer (Fox). Emma Thompson is a one-time house-keeper whose relationship with the butler is thwarted by anachronistic conventions and the butler's emotional paralysis. Wasted lives, emotional desolation, political myopia. The "what might have been theme" is quietly heart-wrenching. Based on Kazuo Ishiguro's melancholy 1989 novel, scripted by Ruth Praver Jhablava. Both book and film are an indictment of and, simultaneously and obliquely, a kind of tribute to an old order and social values. Hopkins, Thompson, Fox and Grant deliver immaculate performances in this meticulously mounted, visually beautiful adaptation which works through oblique suggestion and subtle shifts in tone. It's a little too long and the coda is unnecessarily extended. But it's the best of the Ivory-Merchant-Jhablava collaborations

Revisited later: I wasn't quite as knocked over this time around... but it's still a fine film which stands up well (unlike most of the pap and pulp produced in the 90s, possibly the most impoverished decade in the history of the cinema... excepting, of course, the 80s!).



ROBBERY

1967 Th 3.50 6.9 GB2

Yates, Peter

Douglas Slocombe

Stanley Baker, Barry Foster,
Frank Finlay, James Booth,
Joanna Pettet, William Marlowe

Heist/caper movie about the Great Train Robbery of 1963; the reconstruction of real-life events is well done....but sub-**Rififi** (as most heist movies are). The film focuses primarily on the planning and the clockwork efficiency of the robbery itself. The subplot with Clifton's wife is Nowheresville. Surely they could have come up with someone more interesting than James Booth as the Inspector. In fact, most of the characters are not very interesting; there are too many of them and too little time for any detailed characterization. Made before Yates hit the big time with **Bullitt** and well before his best, **The Friends of Eddie Coyle**. **The League of Gentlemen** did this sort of thing a lot better. Quite enjoyable but I was hoping for something better. Does Stanley Baker ever smile on screen (apart from a kind of ironic grimace which I have glimpsed once or twice across about ten films)?



ROOM AT THE TOP

1958 D 4.50 7.7 GB

Clayton, Jack

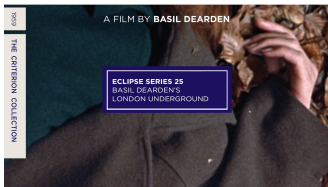
Freddie Francis

Laurence Harvey, Simone Signoret, Heather Sears, Donald Wolfitt, Donald Houston

Young working class man with a heavy chip on his shoulder and an ambition to make it to the top, schemes to marry the boss's daughter. Things are complicated by class antagonisms and a married woman with whom he inadvertently falls in love. The physical, social and psychological ambience of post-war industrial Yorkshire (depressing!) is well depicted and the film is beautifully crafted — top shelf cinematography from Freddie Francis (though the print has gone a bit grey), tight script, striking performances from Harvey, “The Eyes” Signoret and Wolfitt with splendid support from the secondary players, the whole thing put together with stylish economy. It's a film of some ambition, complexity and nuance. I think it stands up remarkably well. The fate of the Simone Signoret character was perhaps unnecessarily melodramatic (in the pejorative sense of the word). **RT** is one of the first, and best, in the kitchen-sink/“angry young man” genre. I read John Braine's novel eons ago; was it as good as the film? Couldn't say at this distance. The film rubs shoulders with such classics as **Saturday Night and Sunday Morning**, **Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner** and **This Sporting Life**. Several critics writing retrospectively about **Room at the Top** think it's rather “out-dated”. I disagree: its themes are still altogether pertinent and it remains an impressive piece of film-making with style, feeling and zap. Those who dismiss Joe as a selfish cad have not really tuned in to the film's subtleties. Much was made at the time of the film's treatment of sex which obscured its real distinction.



SAPPHIRE



SAPPHIRE

1959 Th 3.75 7.2 GB2

Dearden, Basil

Harry Waxman

Nigel Patrick, Yvonne Mitchell,
Michael Craig, Bernard Miles

Late 50s London crime drama dealing with racial tensions, prejudice and identity. Not a bad crime story and generally neatly put together but some of the treatment of the racial themes now seems a bit awkward, though it was certainly quite daring and confrontational at the time. The film's didactic purpose sometimes robs the drama of subtlety though the interplay and contrast between the two detectives is handled well. Nigel Patrick and Earl Cameron are excellent; the rest of them just OK. Paul Harris as David is not much good. Some plot developments are telegraphed too early. Not another Johnny Dankworth score! Please! Made just after the Notting Hill riots.

Although this is a tidy little film it's nowhere near as impressive as two other Deardens seen in recent times: **The League of Gentlemen** and **Victim**. Nonetheless, certainly well worth seeing.

Two films in two nights about the sheer stupidity as well as the potency of racial prejudice (the other being **The Unforgiven**).



SAT NIGHT & SUNDAY M

1960 D 4.25 7.7 GB

Reisz, Karel

Freddie Francis

Albert Finney, Rachel Roberts,
Shirley Ann Field

Gritty working class drama with Finney in his first lead role as a rebellious and belligerent young man – an “anti-hero” no less – who understands “the system” but is powerless to change it. Captures the grimy texture of factory life in Nottingham, the grind, the monotony, the noise, the poverty... but most of all the constricted horizon. Freddie Francis’ cinematography is superb, and Finney and Roberts are both excellent. A very fair specimen of the “angry young men” school of the late 50s (Osborne, Braine, Sillitoe et al) who were soured by the ugly face of industrial England, and the inequities of the class system. Working class life was rarely portrayed in the British cinema before this movement except as a source of humour. The strengths of the film derive primarily from Sillitoe’s novel, Finney’s abrasive performance and Francis’ cinematography. (Finney and Roberts most recently seen respectively in **The Browning Version** and **Picnic at Hanging Rock** in completely different roles; both fine actors indeed.) Johnny Dankworth musical soundtrack – how 60s! The best of the literary source material for this sub-genre came from David Storey, especially **This Sporting Life** (also starring Rachel Roberts, with a young Richard Harris) and Sillitoe (this and **The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner**). John Braine’s novel provided the story for the impressive and under-rated **Room at the Top**. **SNSM** has weathered much better than some of the other “kitchen-sinkers” of the period. A kind of story and style of film-making quite at odds with the conventions of classical Hollywood. This was the best film from Czech-born Karel Reisz; his two other main claims to fame were **Morgan** (1966) and **The French Lieutenant’s Woman** (1981). Rachel Roberts was devastated by her divorce from Rex Harrison in 1971, after ten years of marriage; she subsequently hit the bottle and suicided in 1980, a very sad story. Finney turned down a knighthood in 2000, saying that such honours perpetuated snobbery.



SCARLET CLAW, THE

1944 Th 3.75 7.3 GB

Neill, Roy William

George Robinson

Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce,
Miles Mander, Kay Harding,
Gerald Hamer, Paul Cavanagh,
Ian Wolfe

Holmes and the Doctor are in Quebec on unspecified business when they hear of a grisly murder in a small town, blamed on a supernatural monster. Their investigations bring them up against the haughty husband of the murdered woman, a plodding policeman, a bar full of taciturn types (who later burst into song and drunken revelry for no apparent reason), a frightened young woman ... Some vaguely Gothic atmospherics with lots of fog and mysterious marshlands. Echoes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Some pretty good cinematography

Why does one watch the SH series? To see Rathbone and Bruce do their thing, to enjoy the narrative puzzles in what is almost certainly a rather implausible plot, to wait for Bruce's ejaculatory "Great Scott!", to enjoy the secondary characters, to see "Justice" done, and to hear Rathbone's closing homily. All of these expectations are met in the better-than-average **The Scarlet Claw**, the sixth in the 12-part Universal series most of which was directed by Neill.



SECRET AGENT, THE

1936 Th 3.50 6.6 GB2

Hitchcock, Alfred

John Gielgud, Madeleine Carroll,
Peter Lorre, Percy Marmont,
Robert Young

Espionage thriller loosely based on Somerset's Maugham's Ashenden short stories. As a spy thriller it's lukewarm weak tea — an unhappy mixture of suspense and comedy which works so well in many of Hitch's films but which just falls flat here. But as a cinematic exercise there is plenty of interest in Hitch's technical and aesthetic moves, especially the factory sequence and the last fifteen minutes where the thing does heat up a little (though Elsa's emotional flip-flops are quite bewildering). The Peter Lorre character is neither funny nor sinister — just embarrassing. The story is thin. Gielgud is not at all simpatico. Ordinary print.

Nowhere near as good as the two films which flanked it, *The Thirty Nine Steps* and *Sabotage* (which are the best of British Hitchcock, along with *The Lady Vanishes*). The problems derive from the fragmentary source material which is never worked into a satisfactory narrative, the mis-casting of Gielgud and the ham-fisted performance of Lorre. After *M* he turned into a parody of himself — no doubt this was not entirely his fault. A pity. (It sometimes comes off well, as in *The Maltese Falcon*, but it's often tedious and wasteful.)



SECRETS AND LIES

1996 D 3.75 8.0 GB

Leigh, Mike

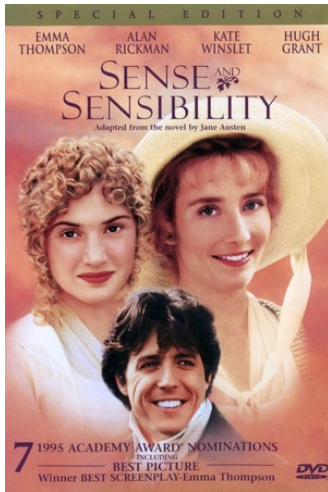
Dick Pope

Brenda Blethyn, Timothy Spall,
Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Phyllis
Logan, Claire Rushbrook

Closely-observed ensemble piece involving a family's "secrets and lies", some of the working class family on the rise and some on the decline. Some reminiscences of the late 50s/early 60s kitchen-sinkers, and of Ken Loach's social-problem/"ordinary life" films of the early 70s, plus a touch of the Harold Pinters in the dialogue.

Sometimes a bit ponderous and/or stilted. The score is too insistent that this is "Serious Art". It's an intelligent, humane and entertaining film but I found it slow in parts, laboured in others. Impressive enough but not quite matching its elevated reputation. I felt rather as if I should like it more than I did.

This film has a massive reputation. It's ludicrous that it should come ahead (at no 40), on the BFI Top 100 British films chart, of films like **Colonel Blimp** (45), **Oliver Twist** (46), **This Sporting Life** (67), **Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner** (61) and **The Cruel Sea** (75). But such lists are almost always full of anomalies. (My own lists are the exceptions!)



SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

1995 D 4.25 7.7 GB

Lee, Ang

Michael Coulter

Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet,
Hugh Grant, Alan Rickman,
Elizabeth Spriggs, Gemma Jones

Generally a pleasing adaptation of Jane Austen's wonderful novel about "sense" (Elinor: Thompson) and "sensibility" (Marianne: Winslet), about the pervasive grip of money and social status, about the mysteries of love. Marvellously scripted by Emma Thompson whose adaptations, amendments and elisions do no harm and retain much of the elegance, the fine shading, the wit, irony and satire of the novel. Interesting, amusing, touching — and nearly all done with a feathery touch. Several critics thought Winslet stole the show. I don't think anyone was interested in "stealing the show" but in any event, Thompson is at the centre of this film, and rightly so. The Extras include her very entertaining speech at the Golden Globes award night. One might have expected Hugh Grant to be playing the Lothario (Willoughby) but he makes a good fist of the dull, befuddled, decent and likeable Edward Ferrars. Nearly all the characters are well cast and nicely played although Sir John and Lucy Steele didn't match my own metal picture of them. Having just finished the novel I don't know how much of my pleasure was a sort of residual after-life and how much actually derived from the film itself. Would I have liked it as much if I hadn't just read the novel? (In the case of most adaptations of literary classics the film almost always suffers badly by juxtaposition with the original. Not so here. A much more familiar phenomenon is the transmutation of literary dross into cinematic gold; **Vertigo** will do as a representative case.)



SENSE OF AN ENDING, THE

2017 D 3.75 6.3 GB

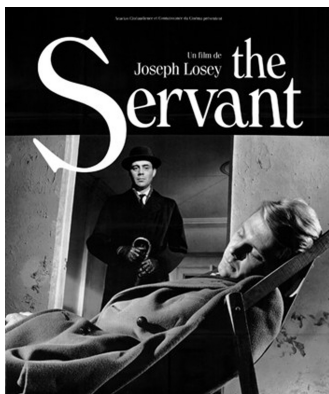
Batra, Ritesh

Christopher Ross

Jim Broadbent, Charlotte Rampling, Michelle Dockery, Harriet Walter, Emily Mortimer, Billy Howle, Freya Mavor

Julian Barnes' novels are witty, elegant, nuanced and very literary — not promising material for the screen. But this adaptation works quite well. Soon-to-be grandfather, divorcee, grumpy-bum and camera-buff Tony (Broadbent) receives an unexpected letter which reawakens memories of several intertwined relationships in his university days. This triggers a series of events and confrontations which force him to reconsider his past and to ponder the ambiguous relationship between “history” (what actually happened) and “memory” (the story we tell ourselves about our lives). Self-deception, regret, reconciliation of sorts. It's often amusing, occasionally touching and consistently interesting. It's closely observed, well crafted and splendidly acted. Perhaps a little understated and “polite” for some tastes. Having read several tepid reviews I was in some doubt as to whether this was worth a look; it is. It passes the acid test: one keeps watching without wanting it to end. Covers some of the same terrain as **45 Years**.

Barnes' novel (not his best) won the Booker.



Dirk Bogarde • James Fox
scénario de Harold Pinter

SERVANT, THE

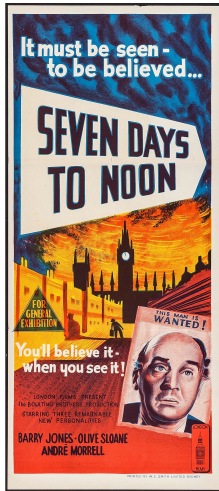
1963 D 4.25 7.9 GB

Losey, Joseph

Douglas Slocombe

Dirk Bogarde, Edward Fox, Sarah Miles, Wendy Craig

Robin Maugham's novel provided scriptwriter Harold Pinter with a creepy story about class enmities, moral decadence and sexual politics. *A claustrophobic fever dream of privilege, power and perversion*, as *Time Out* so succinctly put it. The whole film, despite a small cast, manages, through a few fragmentary episodes, to suggest that the whole structure of English society is pervaded by a kind of amoral cynicism. Everyone behaves badly (even the bishop, a very sinister Patrick Magee). One of Pinter's best film scripts and one of Losey's most impressive but least likeable films. From the opening scene one feels in the presence of an accomplished film-maker who knows precisely what he is doing. Cinematography (Douglas Slocombe); the sinuous camera stalks its prey with feline cunning. (The film had to be in BW.) The score (Dankworth/Cleo Laine) adds to the dark mix. Bogarde is superb (as he often is) and Edward Fox and Craig pretty good. I'm never impressed with Sarah Miles and this was no exception. **The Servant** is too acrid, sordid and cold to ever get anywhere near a list of my favourite films... but it's undeniably impressive. It shares some ground with Polanski's **Cul de Sac** (effete and silly society types, role reversals, sexual degradation etc) but is devoid of its black humour. Dennis Schwartz on **The Servant**: *This once groundbreaking film seems more creepy than important nowadays*. I see his point but I think this undersells it. I didn't at all like **Accident** on revisiting it; this stands up much better. This is the first and best of the Pinter-Losey trilogy (**The Go-Between** was the third).



SEVEN DAYS TO NOON

1950 Th 3.75 7.2 GB2

Boulting, John

Gilbert Taylor

Barry Jones, André Morrell, Olive Stone, Ronald Adam

Post-war London. Idealistic scientist has gone into meltdown over the possible use of nuclear weapons and is threatening to blow up central London. The cops are on the case but it's a race against time. One of several quite impressive films made by the Boulting twin brothers in the decade after the war. A thoughtful exploration of some serious themes and issues. Detailed and convincing depiction of London with many effective street and underground scenes. Barry Jones is a fine actor and well suited to his role as slightly deranged but sympathetic scientist. The rest of the cast is competent, but no more. The plot does deliver some tension (though the split second timing of the ending is a bit of a stretch!). This film stands up well nearly 70 years later.

John Boulting was the principal director but the brothers worked together on all aspects of film-making. The best of them: **Pastor Hall** (40), **Brighton Rock** (48), **Seven Days to Noon** (50), **High Treason** (51), **I'm All Right Jack** (59), **Heavens Above** (63).

Roy Boulting worked his way through five wives, one of whom was Hayley Mills. John Boulting only managed four wives.



SEVENTH VEIL, THE

1945 M 3.50 7.0 GB2

Bennett, Compton

Reginald Wyler

Ann Todd, James Mason, Herbert Lom, Hugh McDermott, Albert Lieven

“The human mind is like Salome at the beginning of her dance...”. Really? The Mysteries of the Sub-conscious. After the death of her parents fourteen-year old Francesca (Todd), who shows enormous musical promise, is put under the guardianship of an older cousin (Mason) who devotes his life to her musical career: a troubled path, shown mainly in flashbacks, lies ahead, including her encounters with four men: Nicholas (her guardian), Peter (McDermott), a jazz musician and suitor, Maxwell (Lieven), a painter, and Dr Larsen (Lom), the all-knowing psychiatrist. Full-blown British melodrama with a generous serve of psychiatric mumbo-jumbo.

Muir Mathieson has a real work-out: he’s both the diegetic and the non-diegetic conductor this time! (Makes up for Geoffrey Keen’s absence!)

This was hugely successful, partly because of the vogue for psychiatry in the period, evident in many of the films of the later 40s. (Why hasn’t Herbert got a pipe?) Ann Todd is a poor facsimile of Garbo and a bit of an Ice Queen. She’s not bad here. The rest of the cast are highly competent. Of course it’s Mason who dominates the screen. Cinematography etc: just fair. All the joints are showing in the construction. But it’s a bit of a suck-in anyway.

No, of course it wasn’t Todd playing the piano; Australian born pianist Eilenn Joyce was actually tickling the ivories.

Poster: “It dares to strip bare a woman’s mind.” Yikes!

Originally Created for Exhibition in IMAX® Theatres



SHACKLETON

2001 DC 3.75 7.8 GB

Butler, George

SHACKLETON'S ANTARCTIC ADVENTURE

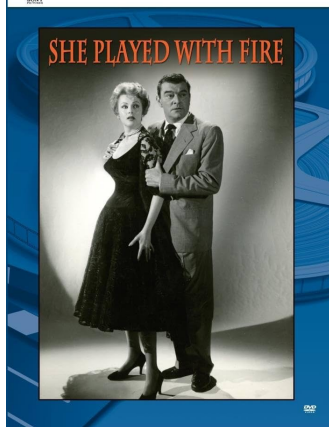
The greatest survival story of all time.

NARRATED BY AN ACADEMY AWARDED VOICER
KEVIN SPACEY



Full title: **Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure.**

Archival footage, reenactments and contemporary material used to tell the astonishing story of Shackleton's epic in Antarctica. Originally made for IMAX. Grand scenery, a quite good narration by Kevin Spacey and giving some sense of an almost unimaginable ordeal during which there was not a single fatality. Tough and resourceful hombres indeed!



SHE PLAYED WITH FIRE

1957 Th 3.75 7.0 GB2

Gilliat, Sidney

Gerald Gibbs

Jack Hawkins, Arlene Dahl,
Geoffey Keen, Bernard Miles,
Dennis Price, Christopher Lee,
Violet Farebrother

Convolved plot involving art frauds, insurance scams, an old manor, a fire, blackmail, murder and another sort of old flame (ie. sub-du Maurier, sub-Hitchcock). Jack is our man; he gets a little out of his depth.

This noirish crime story (with just a touch of the Gothics) is well handled all round: efficient, competent, entertaining. Enough intrigue and suspense to keep us guessing. Is Arlene bad, kinda bad or not bad at all? Or, as the poster, says "Were her lips an invitation to love... or murder?" Taken from Winston Graham's potboiler. (WG wrote *Marnie*, amongst many other things, as well as the popular Poldark novels.)

Is there any post-war British film in which Geoffrey Keen doesn't appear?? Is there any post-war British film in which the orchestra is not conducted by Muir Matheson?

Arlene Dahl worked her way through six husbands including Lex (Tarzan) Barker who was also married to Lana Turner (as well as two others). Lana did her bit too: eight husbands! The Hollywood marital merry-go-round. Arlene (who is not bad in this outing) had a very mediocre screen career. I think the only time I've previously sighted her was in **Slightly Scarlet**.



SHERLOCK H IN W'TON

1943 Th 3.75 7.0 GB2

Neill, Roy William

Les White

Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce,
Marjorie Lord, Henry Daniell,
George Zucco

WW2. Decoy courier taking a super-secret document to Washington disappears — oh no!! SH and Watson head to Washington post-haste, Watson takes an American phrase-book. We see a lot of Washington landmarks. Turns out a match-book is the key to the mystery. Things come to a head in an antique shop. SH gives his usual propaganda spiel at the end.

Dennis Schwarz got it about right: *Even though it's far from believable, it's still one of the most enjoyable in the series.*



SHIP THAT DIED OF SHAME

1955 A 3.75 6.9 GB2

Dearden, Basil

Gordon Dines

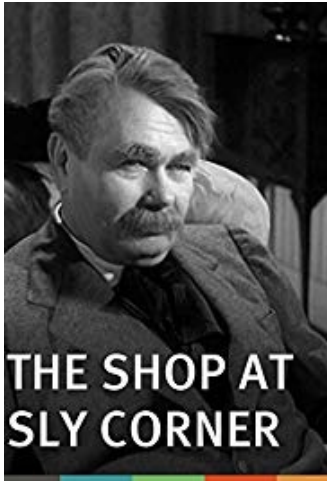
Richard Attenborough, George Baker, Ronald Culver, Virginia McKenna, Bill Owen, Bernard Lee

A well-crafted adaptation of Nicholas Monsarrat's story about a WW2 cruiser and her crew who get involved in more dubious activities after the war. It typifies the better British cinema of the period: professional workmanship from both film-makers and players, an intelligent script with good characterization, the avoidance of clichés and histrionics, some irony and understated humour. I read Monsarrat's novel when I was about 13; I thought it smashing.

Basil Dearden must be one of the half-dozen best British film-makers of the period behind Powell, Lean and Reed: **The Blue Lamp**, **The League of Gentlemen**, **Victim** and **STDS** make an impressive line-up. (Of course, he did make quite a few lemons as well.)

Aka **PT Raiders**

On second viewing: it's a bit tame really.



SHOP AT SLY CORNER, THE

1946 Th 3.75 7.4 GB2

King, George

Hone Glendinning

Oscar Homulka, Derek Farr, Jean
Colin, Kenneth Griffith, Kenneth
Kent

London. Elderly antique dealer with a murky past has to conceal his secrets from his beautiful young daughter, an aspiring violinist; nasty blackmailer has him in a tight spot.

Brisk, well-organized and slightly odd postwar British thriller in which a Nietzschean mo figures prominently. Kenneth Griffith makes a convincingly smarmy blackmailer and Oscar H can be relied on for an energetic performance. Derek Farr is, as usual, White Bread and Jean Colin a vacant space. An almost entirely forgotten early made-for-TV film which is worth a look.

(IMDb lists “Kenneth Kent”, a minor screen actor in the 40s, as the lead and makes no mention of Oscar Homulka. Some sort of stuff-up! There’s no mistaking Oscar! ... turns out there are two listings for SSC depending on which route you take into IMDb.)



SLEEPING TIGER, THE

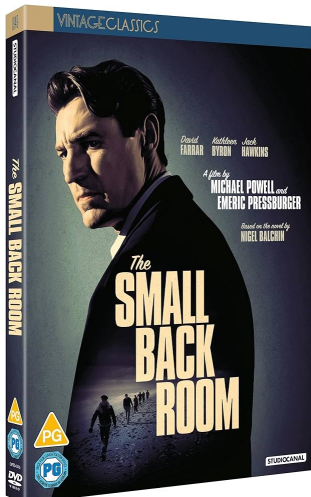
1953 D 3.75 6.6 GB

Losey, Joseph

Harry Waxman

Dirk Bogarde, Alexis Smith,
Alexander Knox, Hugh Griffith

Psychiatrist (Knox) takes Bad Boy (Bogarde) into his home for six months for therapy. Things don't go quite as planned. Filmed in a very restless, edgy style to match the gathering hysteria of the story. In the hands of lesser directors and a weaker cast this would have turned into something quite risible but Bogarde, Smith and Knox manage to keep it on the rails. Knox is pretty good at suggesting the deep ambiguities in the role of the psychiatrist (how much of this is intentional is hard to say.) Losey's films are never less than interesting even when marred by faulty elements. The plot is a bit shaky with more than a small dose of dime-store psychologizing thrown in. As for the "sleeping tiger", the less said the better... Clement's turn-around is not altogether plausible. The score is over-busy, intrusive and irritating. Losey's joke-book is pretty thin...and such jokes as there are somewhat acrid. Losey's first British film, a dry-run for **The Servant** and the start of what came to be called "Losey Baroque". Primarily interesting as a point in the arc of Losey's interesting and distinguished career. Losey and Nicholas Ray were high-school friends in Wisconsin.



SMALL BACK ROOM, THE

1949 A 3.75 7.4 GB2

Powell & Pressburger

Christopher Challis

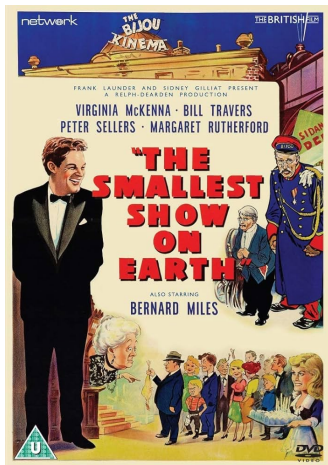
Michael Farrar, Kathleen Byron

Michael Gough, Jack Hawkins,

Anthony Bushell

Wartime story about a bomb disposal expert with a bad leg, an alcohol problem and a difficult relationship. Put together with the usual combination of taste, intelligence and flair that we expect from P&P. The bomb disposal scene is superb. Nice cameos from Cyril Cusack and Robert Morley. Quite different from the usual war drama fare (and John Mills nowhere to be seen!). But...It takes a long time to rev up and the central character and his relationship with Sue are not quite interesting enough to give the thing real grip. It's a fine film with much to recommend it but one of P&P's lesser films.

Aka **Hour of Glory**



SMALLEST SHOW ON EARTH

1957 C 4.00 7.0 GB

Dearden, Basil

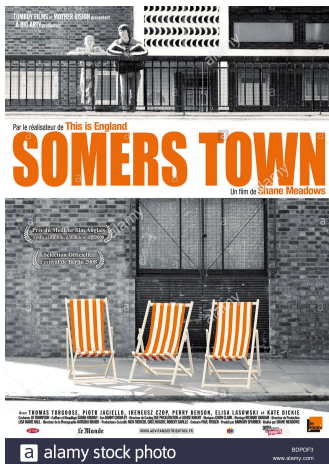
Douglas Slocombe

Peter Sellers, Bernard Miles,
Virginia McKenna, Margaret
Rutherford, Bill Travers, Leslie
Phillips

Impoverished and debt-racked writer (Travers) and his wife (McKenna) are surprised to hear they have inherited an estate which turns out to be a dilapidated and now defunct flea-pit cinema. Local businessman who owns the much more upmarket Grande Cinema wants to buy them out but first they must get the cinema cranking again, with help from the residual staff, an eccentric and feisty old lady (Rutherford) with strange book-keeping practices, an alcoholic projectionist (Sellers) and a crusty old janitor (Miles) who dreams of acquiring a uniform. Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna play the straight pair to these comics. Leslie Phillips and Francis de Wolff lend good support. A lot of nonsense goes on in the theatre with all the players in fine fettle. It has a quirky charm and has its hilarious moments. It's also an oblique homage to the early days of the cinema. Terrible print — nearly gave it away after first few minutes but glad I persisted.

Dearden is best known for his dramas and thrillers but here he shows a dab hand with comedic material.

Aka: **Big Time Operators** (USA title)



SOMERS TOWN

2008 D 3.75 6.9 GB

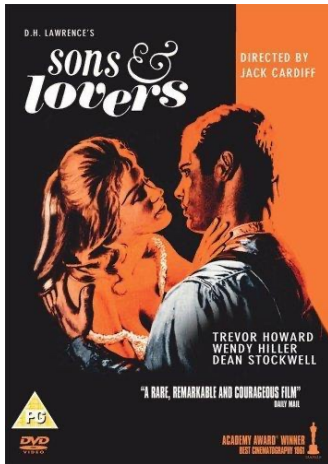
Meadows, Shane

Natasha Braier

Thomas Targoose, Piotr Jagiello,
Ireneusz Czop, Elisa Lasowski,
Perry Benson

Contemporary London. Runaway rough diamond teenager, Tommo, is on the loose in London when he teams up with a Polish youth, Marek, who is living with his hard-drinking father in a grungy apartment. They get into some mischief and both entertain romantic and erotic fantasies about a French waitress working in the neighbourhood (around St. Pancras Station).

Episodic comedy-drama with an improvised and quasi-doco feel, nicely shot in grainy BW, capturing the texture of daily life in one of London's less salubrious parts. Damaged souls, cramped lives, the balm of booze and good humour, escape into fantasy. It's often funny, sometimes touching, all a bit sad. I wasn't quite as excited as some of the critics but this film has some knock-about charm, sharp social observation and visual freshness. I'm glad films like this are still being made. Who can complain about a feature which gets the job done in 68 minutes!



SONS AND LOVERS

1960 D 3.50 7.3 GB

Cardiff, Jack

Freddie Francis

Dean Stockwell, Wendy Hillier,
Trevor Howard, Mary Ure,
Heather Sears

There is much to like in Jack Cardiff's screen adaptation of Lawrence's novel, which might better have been entitled "*Mothers, Sons and Lovers*": Freddie Francis' cinematography (Cinemascope); the evocation of the ugly industrial milieu and the beauty of the surrounding countryside; the altogether excellent performances of Howard and Hillier; some nicely rendered moments. Howard is by far the most vital and "Lawrentian" character in the film, which was surely not the intention (it certainly wasn't Lawrence's!).

Too much of Lawrence's sometimes ridiculous speechifying, and the dialogue is often stilted — sounding like Lawrence rather than the character in question (usually but not always Paul). Dean Stockwell can't manage any kind of English accent, and is seriously miscast; despite his talents as an actor he is quite out of place here; he doesn't look, sound or act anything like a young man from Nottinghamshire. Imagine instead a young Albert Finney or Richard Harris in the role. Stockwell is not only miscast he is generally limp. The whole thing lacks the intensity and the poignancy of the novel; here the only characters we really care about are the father and mother; the rest aren't much more than talking heads.

The best part of the book — William and Paul's childhood — is left out altogether and the film feels somewhat etiolated (and I don't just mean the sex scenes!). Stockwell was only cast as Paul because they thought that would give the film more Box Office appeal in USA. Typically stupid studio decision!



SORRY WE MISSED YOU

2019 D 4.00 7.6 GB

Loach, Ken

Robbie Ryan

Kris Hitchen, Debbie Honeywood,
Rhys MCGowan

Newcastle, UK. Ricky has been battered about in his chequered employment. Tries to make a new start as a “self-employed” franchise delivery driver for PDF – Parcels Delivered Fast. His wife is run off her feet as an over-worked and underpaid care-giver for elderly “clients”. A teenage son is in all sorts at school and elsewhere, and the younger daughter is stressed by the family tensions. One thing after another... “the insulted and the injured”.

A blistering critique of the gig economy, a closely-observed depiction of the depressing social and economic conditions for all those on Struggle Street – a large chunk of the English population – and an angry but controlled protest against the cynicism, greed and amorality of much contemporary “business practice”. Also a portrait of a family under severe duress. It’s forceful, blunt, harrowing and all too believable. Those conversant with Loach’s long career as a maker of social problem films set in a working class milieu will find themselves in familiar territory.



SOUND BARRIER, THE

1952 D 3.50 6.9 GB

Lean, David

Jack Hildyard

Ralph Richardson, Ann Todd,
Nigel Patrick, Denholm Elliott,
John Justin

Fictionalized account of the British pioneering of jet-engine aircraft and the hazardous enterprise of breaking the sound barrier. Richardson is the visionary (or obsessive) aircraft manufacturer, Patrick his chief test pilot, Todd the wife. Scripted by Terence Rattigan. There's nothing to dislike in this film: it's a neatly written and structured story of some interest, well performed and nicely put together, including some fine aerial footage. But it doesn't have much torque: the family drama never generates any buzz and the flight sequences are less than nerve-jangling. It's also too long. Certainly significantly inferior to last week's viewing, Lean's **Hobson's Choice**. It also asks us to entirely forget the fact that Chuck Yeager had already broken the sound barrier. Ice Queen Ann Todd is a little less chilly than usual. A lot of stiff upper lip stuff. A bit stodgy.



SPIDER WOMAN, THE

1943 Th 3.75 7.3 GB2

Neill, Roy William

Charles Van Enger

Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce,
Gale Sondergaard, Dennis Hoey

A baffling series of “pajama suicides” in London prompts Sherlock Holmes to his own “suicide”, much to Watson’s consternation. The case involves a racket with life insurance policies and Holmes deduces that a woman must be behind it all because, after all, the *modus operandi* is “more feline than canine”! Gale Sondergaard is the evil spider woman. Holmes must pass himself off as a minor Indian nobleman in trouble at the casino — his accent is altogether wonky! The finale in a carnival shooting gallery is terrific fun. One of the better outings in the series, directed by Neill who was Universal’s director-of-choice for the Rathbone-Bruce cycle. (This is No 7 in the series.)



SPITFIRE

2018 DC 4.25 7.5 GB

Fairhead, D & A Palmer

John Collins

The story of the development, wartime role and iconic significance of the Spitfire. Graphic archival footage and sound recordings, some magnificent present-day aerial photography and plenty of reminiscences from men and women involved with this “instrument of war”. The narrative is well-structured, the images powerful and effective, and the memories of the pilots and others are quite moving. It includes clips from the 1942 film based on the life and work of the designer of the Spitfire, RJ Mitchell, who died, at the age of 42, before the war started: **The First of the Few** (also released as **Spitfire**; see the neighbouring review), directed by and starring Leslie Howard. The “stiff upper lip” has become a cliché but these were just ordinary folk who were called on to do a fearful job, did it heroically and without any fuss, and thus played a crucial part in the long, destructive war and the ultimate triumph of the Allies. Nice touch on the part of the film-makers to dedicate the film to pilots of all nations who served during the war.

Two tiny criticisms: sometimes the interesting monologues are drowned out by overlaid sound effects; the final section went on too long and became anti-climactic.

Full title: **Spitfire: the Plane that Saved a Nation**



SPITFIRE

1942 D 4.00 7.0 GB

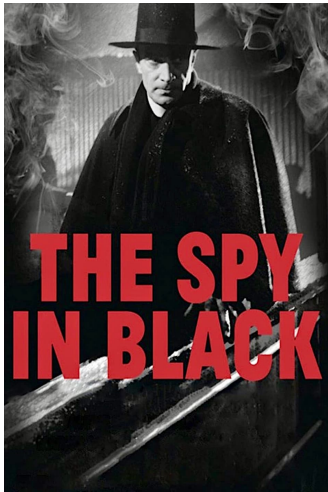
Howard, Leslie

Georges Périnal

Leslie Howard, David Niven,
Rosamund John, Roland Culver,
Derek De Marney

The story of aircraft designer R.J. Mitchell whose career culminated in the production of the Spitfire without which, arguably, Britain may have succumbed to Nazi Germany in 1940. Whilst made in the middle of the war against Germany the film is not a propaganda vehicle but an inspiring account of one man's vision, courage and commitment — qualities which in the end cost him dearly. Made all the more poignant by the death of Leslie Howard, aged about 50, in the year after the film was made. Mitchell died of cancer in 1937, aged 42. Beautifully played and very well put together. I was moved to search out this film after seeing the recent and very fine documentary with the same title; it includes several clips from this film. The print is very poor but I was so engrossed in the story that my low tolerance threshold for poor prints seemed to disappear.

Aka: **The First of the Few**



SPY IN BLACK, THE

1939 A 3.75 7.0 GB2

Powell, Michael

Berbarbs Browne

Conrad Veidt, Valerie Hobson,
Marius Goring, Sebastian Shaw

1917. German U-boat commander is smuggled onto the Orkney island of Hoy to check out British naval movements. An early Powell film, scripted by Pressburger, this shows some of the hallmarks which so distinguished their later work: a feel for landscape and atmosphere, a strong visual sense, rounded characterization, an intelligent and often ironic treatment of themes, a kind of vitality and human sympathy. Conrad Veidt and Valerie Hobson are both splendid. Quite an extraordinary film to make on the brink of WW2 really.

It's not vintage Powell-Pressburger but there's enough there to make this minor film a pleasure to watch. Powell is credited as the sole director and Emeric Pressburger only as one of the script-writers... but one assumes the usual collaborative relationship. [The run time is 82 minutes, not 92 as listed on the cover.]

Aka **U-Boat 29**



STAN & OLLIE

2018 D 3.75 7.3 GB

Baird, Jon

Laurie Rose

Steve Coogan, John C Reilly,
Shirley Henderson, Nina Arianda,
Rufus Jones

Laurel and Hardy reached the peak of their Hollywood success in the late 30s; **S&O** tells the story of their British tour in 1953 when they were trying to revive their fortunes in a series of stage shows. Coogan and Reilly (recently seen in **The Sisters Brothers** where he was about all the film had going) give astonishingly convincing and touching performances and the film delivers a neatly organized package of the funny, the sad, and the nostalgic. Show-biz, friendship, marriage and the ravages of old age are all given light-handed treatment. The problem with the film is that it rarely goes beneath the surface and we are left with a featherweight entertainment which might have been made into something weightier and more memorable. But I'm glad to have seen this homage to two comedians who loomed large in my very earliest experiences of the cinema. (And hey, they were a hell of a lot funnier than Abbot & Costello!) Reilly's make-up job took four hours a day. (The DVD cover notes say it's 119 minutes; it's actually 98.)



STARS LOOK DOWN, THE

1940 D 4.00 7.2 GB

Reed, Carol

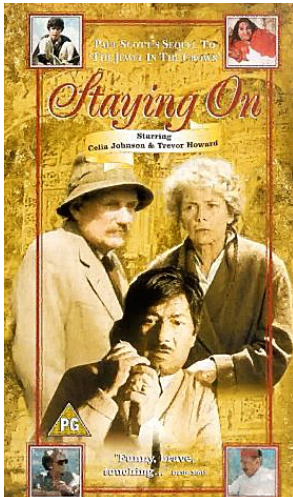
Mutz Greenbaum

Michael Redgrave, Margaret Lockwood, Emyln Williams, Edward Rigby, Nancy Price

Adapted for the screen by AJ Cronin from his own novel, an inter-war story about life in a northern mining town. A very convincing depiction of the harsh conditions, family life, political tensions. It doesn't have the pictorial power of **How Green Was My Valley**, nor the pathos of Ford's film...but it's probably more realistic and has its own merits – an excellent cast (though Michael Redgrave never sounds like a north country lad), a well-structured narrative (but it drags a little in the middle), a richness of detail which gives it a semi-documentary feel, and touching, unsentimental performances from Rigby and Price as the parents. The underground mine scenes are particularly well-handled as is the final crisis. The women don't emerge at all well. Was Cronin a grumpy old misogynist (I have no idea)? Margaret Lockwood is a bit of a cliché.

The film was shot in Workington. Some of the themes and motifs are reminiscent, inevitably, not only of **How Green Was My Valley** but also **Sons and Lovers** as well as some of the kitchen-sinkers of the late 50s and early 60s.

Reed's career as a frontline director was already well under way – he had already made about ten features, but this was his first film of any real distinction. (Sarris thinks it's over-rated – probably because he hates “social message” films. He doesn't think much of Reed generally; one of his critical blind spots.)



STAYING ON

1980 D 3.50 7.3 GB

Narrizano, Silvio

Wolfgang Suschitzky

Trevor Howard, Saeed Jaffrey,
Celia Johnson, Zia Mohyeddin

Portrait of Two Marriages. A Granada TV production. Elderly English couple living out their later years in an Indian hill station (called Pankot in the film but actually Simla), twenty-five years after Indian independence. Nice to see Howard and Johnson (**Brief Encounter**) in harness together again. Well acted, quite funny in parts, some touching scenes. But not altogether satisfactory. Poor production values (despite shooting on location in India), exacerbated by low-grade print.

I think it was a mistake to amplify the comic and satiric aspects at the expense of the novel's more sombre themes about people who end up as anachronisms, left-overs from another time, another way of life. It's doesn't really capture the poignancy of Paul Scott's wonderful but profoundly sad story (easily his best novel).



STILL LIFE

2013 D 4.00 7.4 GB

Pasolini, Uberto

Stefano Falivene

Eddie Marsan, Joanne Froggatt,
Karen Drury

A quiet, lemon-and-sugar comedy/drama about a middle-aged bachelor and council worker who tries to find the next of kin of people who die alone and abandoned. “Minimalist” is the word — restrained, still, modest, closely observed, slyly humorous, sad and touching. Beautiful score by Rachel Portman (married to Pasolini) and exquisite performances (without being at all precious and without any Ivory-Merchant style gloss) from Marsan and Froggatt.

It’s not often that a film reminds me of a Barbara Pym novel — the quiet and sensitive observation of small lives and thwarted hopes, enlivened by a sharp eye for the ironies and anomalies of everyday life. This kind of delicacy and restraint is very far removed from the prevailing ethos in contemporary Hollywood! The film took a fair shellacking from most of the spectacularly unsympathetic American critics. (48 on Metascore!)



SUMMERTIME

1955 M 4.00 7.4 GB

Lean, David

Jack Hildyard

Katherine Hepburn, Rossano
Brazzi, Isa Miranda

In the lineage of **Love Story**, **Three Coins in a Fountain**, **The Barefoot Contessa**, **Roman Holiday** and **Come September** — i.e., a Hollywood love story in an exotic Italian location. ‘Hollywood-on-the-Tiber’ is a sub-generic category. Lovely to look at (cinematography by Jack Hildyard), a touching story and superbly acted (as usual) by the extraordinary Ms Hepburn. A study in loneliness, repression, desire and *joie de vivre*, done (for the most part) with some subtlety and style. Script by Lean and HE Bates from a stage play by Arthur Laurent. Some of the symbolism is a bit rough-house — eg. fireworks/sexual release. But heck, I’m not complaining. The boy is not altogether convincing in some scenes. Lean’s first film made on location.

Rossano Brazzi was most familiar to English-speaking audiences through **Three Coins in the Fountain**, **The Barefoot Contessa**, **South Pacific**, and **The Italian Job** as well as a swag of TV series.

A few of the more interesting movies set in Venice: **The Lost Moment** (Martin Gabel, 1947), **Senso** (Visconti, 1954), **Eva** (Joseph Losey, 1962), **Death in Venice** (Visconti, 1971), **Don’t Look Now** (Nicholas Roeg, 1973), **The Wings of the Dove** (Iain Softley, 1997).



SUNSET SONG

2015 D 3.75 6.4 GB

Davies, Terence

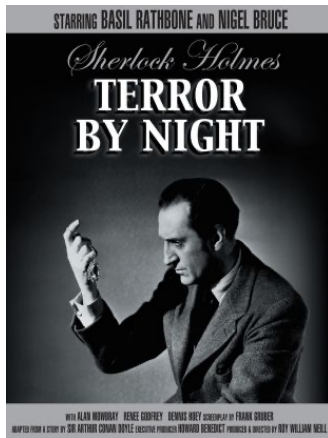
Michael McDonough

Agyness Deyn, Peter Mullan,
Kevin Guthrie, Daniela Nardini

Scotland on the eve of WW1, small rural community. A young girl's coming to womanhood in a harsh but beautiful land. Based on Lewis Grassic Gibbon's 1932 novel. It's lush, lyrical, romantic ... and all a weeny bit predictable.

The first forty minutes are slow, ponderous and irritatingly painterly, but it slowly intensifies but then lapses into something turgid and heavy-handed in the last twenty minute. The middle half, anchored by Agyness Deyn's fine performance, is pretty good. Surprisingly low IMDb score — would have thought this would do better than that.

I loved Davies film about Liverpool but didn't at all care for **The Deep Blue Sea** — I have some of the same misgivings here, to a lesser degree. There's much to like in this film but it didn't deliver quite the emotional charge for which it was so clearly striving (the wartime scene in particular). One is too often conscious of the director's controlling hand. Not without its satisfactions ... but overall a bit disappointing. A poor man's Hardy transposed to Aberdeenshire.



TERROR BY NIGHT

1946 Th 3.75 7.0 GB2

Neill, Roy William

Maury Gertsman

Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, Alan Mowbray, Dennis Hoey, Renee Godfrey, Frederick Warlock

Helter-skelter through the night on the express train from London to Scotland. The “Star of Rhodesia”, the world’s most precious diamond, is on board the train — but where? Is the train ride a “one way ticket to death”, as the poster proclaims? Holmes is on the case while Dr Watson tries his hand at a bit of sleuthing as well.

One of the more attractive offerings in the Neill-Rathbone-Sherlock Holmes cycle (this was the 13th of the 14): reasonably good story though somewhat implausible (as always!), plenty of train action, a few twists and turns, some humour, eccentric characters etc. The only ingredient missing in this one is an interesting woman — where’s Gale Sondergaard when you need her?



TESTAMENT OF YOUTH

2015 D 4.00 7.3 GB

Kent, James

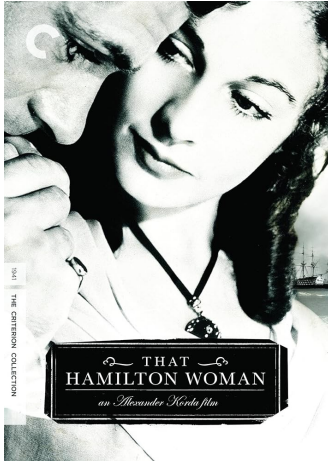
Rob Hardy

Alicia Vikander, Kit Harrington,
Dominic West, Miranda
Richardson

There is a good deal to like about this intelligent adaptation of Vera Brittain's celebrated war memoir: an inspiring story and war memoir with a very sympathetic female protagonist, superbly portrayed by the Swedish actress Alicia Vikander; tastefully and lavishly mounted with painstaking attention to period detail; some beautiful touches throughout when dealing with volatile and difficult material; nicely paced, never less than engrossing and building to a moving climax. I also liked the foregrounding of the brother-sister relationship, and the way the film showed how WW1 shattered the Edwardian idyll of the upper classes. One more thing: it understates the moral heroism of its protagonist — more effective than the Hollywood tendency to over-statement.

Like many big-budget British films (**The Imitation Game**, **The King's Speech** et al) it's an Oscar-Hunter which actually plays it pretty safe. From some points of view the film is just a touch too polite (though it's never twee). Difficult to press the point too hard because apparently the film is faithful to both the letter and the spirit of Brittain's memoir. Nonetheless, it could have had a bit more edge, a bit more abrasion. On the other hand it is to be commended for avoiding some of the grosser sentimental staples of this kind of war story.

From what little I have read about VB she seems to have been an impressive and altogether admirable person.



THAT HAMILTON WOMAN

1941 D 3.75 7.3 GB

Korda, Alexander

Rudolph Maté

Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier,
Alan Mowbray, Gladys Coopers

Alexander Korda: Hungary and England's answer to David Selznick – a no-expense-spared-but-do-it-my-way producer/director. Korda gives the love story of Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton the full treatment along with plenty of patriotic rah-rah ("England expects every man to do his duty"...etc.; it is, of course, a sumptuous propaganda piece, amongst other things.) Lavishly produced, handsomely upholstered and stylishly shot by Rudolph Maté. Told in flashback but without any treatment of Emma's later life other than what can be inferred. Leigh sparkles and Olivier is pretty good. Mowbray and Gladys Cooper give sterling service in secondary roles. The film manages to balance the military and romantic stories pretty well though the naval/battle scenes were tedious. The film is too long and some of these might profitably have been compressed. Apparently this was Winston Churchill's favourite film; by his own account he watched it 83 times!

Olivier and Leigh were recently married and the glamour couple of the moment (the romance cooled pretty quickly; this was their only film together as man and wife although they remained married for 20 years).

Made in Hollywood.

Aka **Lady Hamilton**



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

THIRD MAN, THE

1949 Th 4.75 8.2 GB2

Reed, Carol

Robert Krasker

Joseph Cotten, Orson Welles,
Alida Valli, Trevor Howard,
Bernard Lee

Graham Greene's edgy script, Reed's directorial nous, Robert Krasker's dazzling on-location cinematography, the Cotten-Welles team from **Citizen Kane**, the music of Anton Karris — all converge in one of those rare miracles where everything is just right, in perfect relationship to everything else, making the film way more than the sum of its parts (brilliant enough in their own right). A film about two things: the moral climate of post-war Europe, pervaded by defeat, betrayal, treachery, corruption and cynicism (did anyone understand post-war Europe better than Greene? Did anyone evoke it better than Reed?); and secondly, the expressive possibilities of cinema. It is the latter which redeems the almost entirely desolate subject. Bravura cinema (irresistibly reminiscent of **Kane**) with several mesmerizing sequences (on the ferris wheel, in the sewers, the finale — one of the great endings!). The players are uniformly good, not forgetting Bernard Lee's cheerful "normality" which only throws the other characters into sharper relief. Cotten and Howard are both real pros, as we already knew. Orson Welles penned his own "cuckoo clock" speech on the spot. Wonder what Graham G thought about it? Cinematographer Krasker may well be Australia's most significant (but widely unknown) contribution to the cinema. As in many great films the plot is quite derisory: location, mood, character and moral quandary are everything. As glittering an achievement as **The Third Man** obviously is, I prefer **The Fallen Idol** which has many of this film's merits, albeit in more minor register but also with more human warmth. Greene, as well as being the mid-century's finest English novelist, was also a film critic and screenwriter of some distinction. And consider the many adaptations of G's novels: **Orient Express** (from *Stamboul Train*), **The Fugitive** (*The Power and the Glory*), **Brighton Rock** (x2), **Our Man in Havana**, **End of the Affair** (x2), **The Ministry of Fear**, **This Gun for Hire**, **The Heart of the Matter**, **The Comedians**, **The Quiet American** (x2), **The Honorary Consul**, **The Human Factor**, **Travels with My Aunt** and **England Made Me**. Closest rival I can presently summon is Hemingway: **Farewell to Arms** (x2), **For Whom the Bell Tolls**, **Sun Also Rises**, **Islands in the Stream**, **The Killers** (x3), **Old Man & the Sea** (x2), **Snows of Kilimanjaro**, and **To Have and Have Not** (x3). Steinbeck: **Grapes of Wrath**, **East of Eden**, **Cannery Row**, **Tortilla Flat**, **The Red Pony** (x2), **Of Mice and Men** (x2), **The Winter of Our Discontent**, **Wayward Bus**, and **Viva Zapata**.



THIS HAPPY BREED

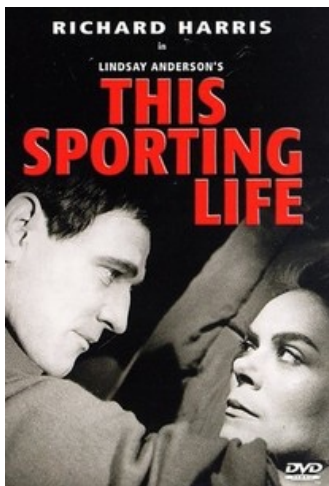
1944 D 4.00 7.3 GB

Lean, David

Ronald Neame

Celia Johnson, Robert Newton,
John Mills, Kay Walsh, Stanley
Holloway

Superb ensemble acting in this well crafted and touching episodic drama about the vicissitudes of a very ordinary English family between the wars. Ronald Neame's cinematography is efficient, occasionally elegant, while Lean's directions is sensitive and intelligent, avoiding the pitfalls of too much sentimentality on one side, and too much facile comedy on the other. Noel Coward deserves credit for the play on which Lean based the script. Interesting characters, believable relationships. I suppose it might be seen as WW2 propaganda about the sturdy values (stoicism, family, duty, love of the King etc) of plain English folks — and no doubt that's part of the agenda; but it transcends those sorts of limits. The Technicolor is gorgeous. Marvellous opening sequence (in the empty house). In many respects a film of modest virtues — but heck, the cinema could do with a whole lot more modesty (virtually unknown in contemporary Hollywood!) Some of the social and political commentary might have had a sharper edge: class antagonisms were a very real part of English society (as no doubt they still are). The film squibbed it a bit on this front. The general ideological thrust is conservative (we don't expect firebrand radicalism from Noel Coward!) But the same could be said about the vast bulk of British films in the 40s and 50s before the arrival of the kitchen-sink dramas. John Mills is too old for the part (as he was in *In Which We Serve*: in 1944 he was 36 years old.) Celia Johnson: what a splendid actor. She didn't make many films — devoted a decade to her family after WW2. Married to Peter Fleming, brother of Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond. Died in 2005. (Celia Johnson was only three years older than Kay Walsh.) And what an appealing actor is Kay Walsh (Queenie). She and David Lean were married 1940-1949. This was the second of the four Lean-Coward collaborations (*In Which We Serve*, *Blithe Spirit* and *Brief Encounter* being the others) and the first feature over which Lean had complete directorial control, showing early signs of his considerable talents. Title comes from Richard II: *'This happy breed of men, this little world, / This precious stone set in the silver sea, / Which serves it in the office of a wall, / Or as a moat defensive to a house, / Against the envy of less happier lands, / This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.'*



THIS SPORTING LIFE

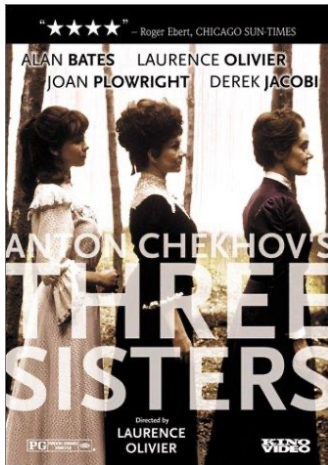
1963 D 5.00 7.8 GB

Anderson, Lindsay

Denys Coop

Rachel Roberts, Richard Harris,
Arthur Lowe, Colin Blakely, Alan
Badel

North Yorkshire mining townA film combining sledgehammer force and with a good deal of fine-grained social observation and acute psychological insight in a poignant story of a love that could never be, between a professional football player and his widowed landlady. Harris and Roberts are both outstanding, and the whole cast is excellent. The complementary performances of Harris (on full throttle most of the time, somewhat reminiscent of a young Paul Newman or Brando) and Roberts (more restrained but unleashing a couple of explosive eruptions) make an interesting contrast. The football sub-culture, replete with homoerotic undertones, class divisions and latent violence, is nicely captured. Kitchen sink trademarks: gritty realism, location shooting, fragmented life-like dialogue, rough humour, the pathos of lives stunted by an impoverished social environment. A bit more “arthouse” in technique than some of the others: fractured narrative, refusal to unravel various enigmas etc. Generally good soundtrack with a few bad moments. The spider symbolism was a bit much, as was Margaret’s rather abrupt death. Critics (many of them) who describe Frank as a “brute” and a “thug” are on the wrong train! Harris’ career, thrown off course by his hell-raising, was not as distinguished as one might have expected after his powerhouse performance here. (His role in **Unforgiven** was one of the few of any lasting interest.) He was a pretty good rugby player. He died in 2002. Many of the best British actors of his generation (Peter O’Toole and Richard Burton among them) largely wasted their talents, while, for one reason or another, others (like Tom Courtney) simply faded. Albert Finney and Alan Bates probably had the most productive film careers. James Mason and Dirk Bogarde were the best of a slightly earlier generation. David Storey (himself a one-time professional footballer) was the best of the “working class” writers of the 60s, and the film owes a great deal to his script. An oddity: this was the first of Lindsay Anderson’s eight feature films and by far the best, the hugely over-rated **If...** having faded into oblivion while his other projects have also dated badly. A better theatre director and critic than film-maker. Is this the best of the kitchen-sink man genre? Very likely it is. Better, than **Saturday Night**, good as that film is. (The BFI Top 100 British Films Film Poll had **NSM** at 15, **TSL** at 52 and **Loneliness of LD Runner** at about 60.) How sad to think of Roberts’ unhappy end.



THREE SISTERS

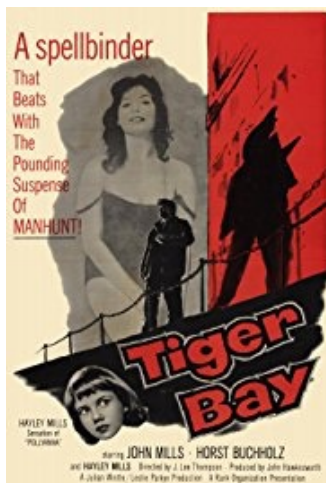
1970 D 4.00 6.7 GB

Olivier, Laurence

Geoffrey Unsworth

Joan Plowright, Jeanne Watts,
Laurence Olivier, Alan Bates,
Ronald Pickup, Louise Purnell,
Derek Jacobi

Chekhov's lugubrious play about three sisters and a constellation of unhappy characters who move in and out of their lives. The setting is characteristic: a stifling provincial town with very limited horizons, only escaped through dreams of "Moscow" and "what might have been". Chekhov's characterisation and dialogue have all the hallmarks of his mature work but it is the mood, the psychological and social terrain, that is so immediately recognisable and so unforgettable. Olga: spinster, headmistress, kind, proper, narrow; Masha: intelligent, passionate, unhappily married, repressed; Irini: a dreamy and vaporous romantic. The two elder sisters (Watts and Plowright) are superbly played while the youngest (Purnell) is simply limp and quite uninteresting. We also have the obligatory drunken doctor (Olivier), a weak younger brother and his manipulative and awful wife, a boring and somewhat pathetic school teacher, a lost "Baron" (Pickup), several young soldiers, servants and the handsome colonel (Bates) who also has serious problems at home. The performances are uniformly excellent apart from Purnell (and I've always thought Jacobi massively over-rated). Are we to assess the play? the performance of the play? the filming of the performance? the conception of the film as cinema? Problematic! It's a fine play and the performances are of very high calibre. The film is, not surprisingly, highly theatrical, formal, stagey, talky. There are some concessions to cinematic possibilities (the very effective flash-forward of the duel scene, for instance, or the "dream-forest") and the whole thing is nicely shot by Geoffrey Unsworth in a low-key and muted style. Some critics have claimed that it falls uncomfortably between "theatre" and "cinema"; I prefer to see it as essentially a filmed stage performance with some concessions to "cinema". The film overall passes the critical test: it holds one's attention for 156 minutes — no small feat given the nature of Chekhov's material. I marginally preferred Konchalovsky's **Uncle Vanya** but they are both fine adaptations, much better than Kakoyannis' **The Cherry Orchard** (which featured Alan Bates 30 years on).



TIGER BAY

1959 D 3.75 7.6 GB

Thompson, J Lee

Eric Cross

Hayley Mills, John Mills, Horst
Buchholz, Yvonne Mitchell

Young girl witnesses a crime of passion and gets involved with the killer. The police gradually close in with the finale taking place at sea. Remarkable performance from Hayley Mills (the girl), and good ones from Buchholz (the killer) and John Mills (the detective). The plot is so-so but the relationships are well handled and Thompson manages to screw up the tension. Shot in and around Cardiff with some close observation of the working class milieu. Some effective noir cinematography in the night scenes.

A few ellipses: How did they get out in the country instantaneously? How did the police find the gun? How did John Mills get off the ship so quickly?

Similar story to **Hunted** and like it a modest, well-crafted film carried off with some style and feeling. This one centers more on the child and has superior cinematography while **Hunted** had a better script (I think). Both very enjoyable.

Sadly, this was probably Hayley Mills' finest hour as an actress. Her subsequent career is littered with very ordinary Disney films and with B-grade TV work.



TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER...

2011 PT 4.00 7.1 GB2

Alfredson, Tomas

Hoyt Van Hoytema

Gary Oldman, Colin Firth, Juhn Hurt, Toby Jones, Benedict Cumberbatch, Tom Hardy

Le Carré's classic novel about George Smiley's labyrinthine investigation to uncover the mole in the Circus. It's well-scripted, taut and well acted, and certainly creates the appropriate 70s milieu, Cold War atmospheric and plenty of mystery, suspense, narrative ambiguity and some measure of Le Carré's ironies. However, I'm less impressed with this, especially the direction, the second time around; it now strikes me that, Oldman apart, its merits derive largely from the plot, characterisation and dialogue of the novel. That said it remains a stylish and entertaining film. Gary Oldman is altogether splendid — but not the dishevelled and owl-like character of the novel (so superbly played by Guinness). Oldman plays Smiley as cold, still and a bit sinister — in a word, reptilian. Pretty well all the characters in the BBC series are far more interesting than they are here. Le Carré himself was an executive producer and presumably approved the various violations of the original story (eg. making Guillam gay). I've twice this week been a little disappointed revisiting films which impressed me hugely at the time, the other being **Capote** (from 2005). Part of the explanation is probably that in the commercial cinema there is so much sludge being produced these days (stretching back close on forty years!!) that one is prone to get a little over-excited when something three-quarters good happens to bob up. The recently-visited **The Spy Who Came in from the Cold** will have more staying power than this one. Ritt's film is the best of the screen adaptations of Le Carré, closely followed by Lumet's **The Deadly Affair**. Which is the worst you ask? Probably **The Little Drummer Girl** (George Roy Hill, 1984).



TITFIELD THUNDERBOLT,

1953 C 3.75 7.1 GB

Crichton, Charles

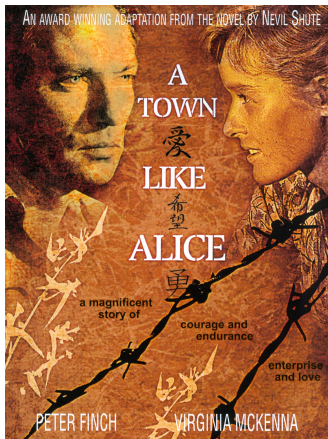
Douglas Slocombe

Stanley Holloway, George Relph,
Naunton Wayne, John Gregson,
Sid James, Gabrielle Brune,
Hugh Griffith

Small English village. The local branch line is in danger of being closed down. Group of villagers rally behind the vicar to run the train service themselves. Couple of shady fellows with a bus service do their best to sabotage the enterprise. Pranks, tomfoolery and some very pleasant rides through the green and gently rolling countryside. Hugh Griffith and Stanley Holloway are for ever in search of a drink.

One of the lesser Ealing comedies but it's an enjoyable jaunt. Train buffs will have a whale of a time. The whole thing has an innocent charm. The first of the Ealing comedies to be shot in Technicolor and nicely done by DoP Slocombe. A mildly but consistently amusing caper in which postwar nationalization is shunted off the tracks. Alastair Sim should have played the bishop.

Crichton's credits include **The Lavender Hill Mob**, **The Battle of the Sexes** and **A Fish Called Wanda** (his last feature).



TOWN LIKE ALICE, A

1956 D 3.50 7.2 GB

Lee, Jack

Geoffrey Unsworth

Virginia McKenna, Peter Finch,
Geoffrey Keen, Jean Anderson,
Tran Van Khe, Takagi

Group of English women trapped in Malaya during the war: no one wants to take charge of them. They march from one camp to another under Japanese guard. English women, Japanese guards, children, Malaysian villagers, and a couple of Aussie soldiers; jungle, swamps, snakes, malaria, death. A rather sanitized view of the war with plenty of stiff upper lips and some Australian larrikin derring-do. The Poms might be in a spot of bother but they are always decent! Nicely shot by Unsworth but otherwise unremarkable — though I must confess I almost had to resort to the Kleenex for the final scene (we get a sum total of about five minutes in Alice Springs itself). There are several quite good sequences and the film overall cuts away from the pack by focusing on a group of women. The story — not the characters — has some basis in real events. Some location shooting in Malaya but only as background: none of the actors were present. The English Rose (McKenna) is competent enough but a bit bloodless while the film generally doesn't go beyond extolling the values of stoicism, courage, self-sacrifice and resilience, seen as essentially English, though the two Aussies and the Japanese guard attract some sympathy. The scenes in Australia are very stilted and remind me of very early Australian television drama. Overall it's about what one might expect from an English adaptation of a best-selling novel written in 1950. It was huge hit in Britain. One doesn't want to be snobbish about a film such as this; it's quite well-crafted, competently acted, well-intentioned, and solid entertainment. But it's limited by its provenance, its period and by the prevailing generic conventions as well as a fairly unimaginative director. It's a much less interesting film than **On the Beach**, made a year or two later and also based on a Nevil Shute novel. **TLA** was made as a mini-series in 1981 with Bryan Brown and Helen Morse.



*The Trials of
Oscar Wilde*

TRIALS OF OSCAR WILDE

1960 D 3.75 7.1 GB

Hughes, Ken

Ted Moore

Peter Finch, Yvonne Mitchell,
John Fraser, Lionel Jeffries, Nigel
Patrick, James Mason

Based on Montgomery Hyde's excellent book about the three Wilde trials. The principal merits of this period drama derive from the performances (almost all excellent) and a literate script. A few good "panoramic" society scenes. Finch gives a nicely modulated study of OW's decline. The saddest aspect of the whole case, quite well rendered here, was Wilde's self-destructive impulse. This film has received very little critical attention, partly because Ken Hughes was no more than a hack. In this case the material and the performances are sufficient to overcome, to some degree, the limitations of the director. He had a long and generally mediocre directing career.

A bit clunky at points, especially in the transitions. Some of the courtroom stuff is a bit bland. Just a fair print.

The lawyer assisting Edward Carson was Christmas Humphreys who later became a popular exponent of Buddhism. Nicholas Roeg was the camera operator on this film. The Ian Fleming mentioned in the credits is not *the* Ian Fleming, as it were. (This Fleming plays Wilde's butler.)

There was another film on the same subject made about the same time, with Robert Morley in the lead. (**Oscar Wilde**, 1960, d. Gregory Ratoff; I think I saw it in the late 60s but can't remember much about it.) Of course, there is much more to the story than can be dealt with in a two-hour film: the plight of the wife and children, the aftermath, the side of Wilde only revealed in the fables and short stories...



TUNES OF GLORY

1960 A 4.00 7.6 GB2

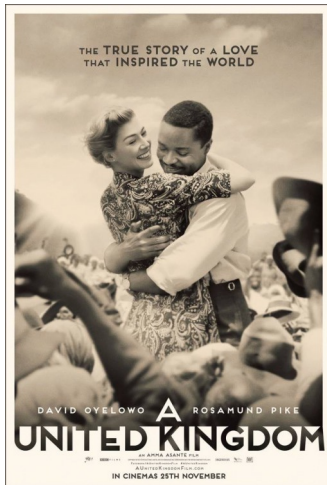
Neame, Ronald

Arthur Ibbetson

Alec Guinness, John Mills,
Gordon Jackson, Kay Walsh,
Susannah York, Dennis Price,
Duncan Macrae

Alec G is a rough, tough, hard-drinking, acting colonel who has come up through the ranks and is popular with the men in his ancient Scottish regiment while temporarily in charge. He is replaced as commanding officer by the authoritarian John M who is a stickler for discipline, propriety and gentlemanly behaviour. Conflict is inevitable; the ranks are divided. The narrative develops in such a way that we feel shifting sympathies as we get to know these two men better as well as the various officers in their orbit. The film gives both Guinness and Mills roles they can get their teeth into, and they make the most of it. Guinness goes in hard, boots and all; Mills brings an unexpected intensity and pathos to his role. Both are playing somewhat against type. (They were initially cast in the opposite roles: Guinness thought it all a bit too easy and suggested he and Mills swap roles. Brilliant idea!) Kay Walsh, Duncan Macrae and Dennis Price provide solid support. Has Gordon Jackson ever played a nasty type? There's an undeveloped sub-plot about the romantic life of both the Guinness character and his daughter (Susannah York in her screen debut). Most of the action takes place indoors. Screenplay by James Kellaway from his own novel. The main problem is that Jock's final turnabout is altogether too abrupt to be fully convincing. Otherwise this is well done: intelligent, well-crafted, thoughtful drama. Well worth a look.

Kenneth Tynan, as a script adviser at Ealing, rejected it on the grounds that there was too much "army worship". A bit harsh I would have thought!



UNITED KINGDOM, A

2016 D 4.00 6.8 GB

Asante, Assam

Sam McCurdy

David Oyelowo, Rosamund Pike,
Jack Davenport, Tom Felton

An inter-racial love story, a chronicle of the birth of a modern African nation (Botswana, formerly Bechuanaland) and a case study in the deceptions, hypocrisies and perfidy of international *realpolitik* and empire-building. It's also a story of the underdog winning the day. As far as I can tell it is generally historically accurate though there has been some fictionalising.

I turned to this recent film somewhat reluctantly and skeptically, fearing that the material at hand might easily lend itself to facile ideology and/or feel-good mush. It avoids these pitfalls by its intelligent and nuanced treatment of the issues at hand, and by focusing on characterisation. It gives us a compelling story about two credible, sympathetic and admirable people who are caught up in a political maelstrom not of their own making but in which they make a courageous stand.

Interesting that Oyelowo's best work (this and **Selma**) has been at the hands of female directors. (I actually thought Rosamund Pike was even more impressive in this one.)

There are a few hackneyed moves in the development of the narrative and perhaps the two principals are a bit too good to be true— but overall I found this film impressive and unexpectedly moving. The baby, on the other hand, was unimpressed by the whole show.

This is Assam Asante's third feature, the first two (unseen) being **A Way of Life** (2004) and **Belle** (2013), all three being concerned with inter-racial relationships. She is also a writer, producer and actor. Asante was born in England to parents from Ghana.



VICEROY'S HOUSE

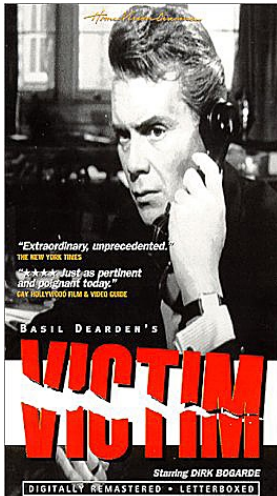
2017 D 3.75 6.7 GB

Chadha, Gurinder

Ben Smithard

Hugh Bonneville, Gillian Anderson, Huma Qureshi, Manish Dayal, Denzil Smith, Simon Callow, Michael Gambon

India 1947. Mountbatten has arrived in India to serve as the last Viceroy and to supervise Britain's withdrawal against the backdrop of sectarian violence, political machinations and the conflicting aims and strategies of Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. The personal drama is largely propelled by a fraught Hindu-Muslim love affair, a good deal of worry on Mountbatten's part, and plenty of good works by Lady Edwina. The film is earnest, heartfelt and sumptuously produced period drama and, on the whole, nicely acted and professionally put together. It's a film of generous intent. Gillian Armstrong is the stand-out as Lady Edwina. The problems are several: the story is too complex to be adequately told in a 100-minute film which devotes a lot of time and energy to a not very compelling love story; for all its good intentions it never really gets inside the skin of the Indian characters; it's almost certainly too kind to Mountbatten and to the English generally. Good to see Churchill getting some well-deserved stick even if the historical authenticity of the portrayal is contested. Quite entertaining and no doubt an eye-opener for the younger generations unfamiliar with the bloody story of partition. Was Gandhi right about partition, the way he was right about so many things? Hard to say! It would be a brave man who's prepared to say he was definitely wrong. Gurinder Chadha is of Indian descent but was born in Kenya and raised in England. Manish Dayal (Jeet Kumar) was born in South Carolina. Mountbatten is reported to have said: "Edwina and I spent all our married lives getting into other people's beds." None of that here! Like many British films, this was trashed by the American critics.



VICTIM

1961 Th 4.75 7.8 GB2

Dearden, Basil

Otto Heller

Dirk Bogarde, Sylvia Sims,
Norman Bird, Dennis Price, John
Barrie, Derrin Nesbitt

[2013] Eminent barrister finds himself enmeshed in a web of deceit and blackmail. One of the earliest British films to confront the issue of homosexuality and the law; combines the social message film with the police procedural. Its central themes are treated intelligently and sympathetically, well dramatized by the players. Bogarde gives a characteristically controlled but intense performance. Does rather pull its punches by suggesting that Farr is not *really* altogether “queer”. Works better as a message film than as a thriller though the plot is not without interest. Originally banned in parts of the USA simply because of its use of the word “homosexuality”! Bogarde made a brave decision to play the role of Farr. As it happened the role freed him from his matinee lead/Doctor persona and opened up the richest phase of his career (**The Servant**, **Accident**, **King and Country**, **Death in Venice** etc.).

[2020] Good when you see a film that’s even better than you thought. This time I was less concerned with the treatment of the plot and theme, impressive as that is, more interested in the film’s aesthetics; they’re superb. The film is a model of tight construction, controlled pacing, sharp dialogue which never becomes too clever, and professional acting all round. Apart from the problematic ambivalence of the film’s ending it’s hard to find much to criticize. Dearden’s best. Not as entertaining as **The League of Gentlemen** but entertainment is not quite what we’re looking for here – a thoughtful drama with real people and a serious theme, played out in the “real world”. (Dearden’s **Sapphire**, 1959, is also worth a look.) I found two small blemishes, so small that I won’t mention them!



VIOLENT PLAYGROUND

1958 D 3.75 6.7 GB

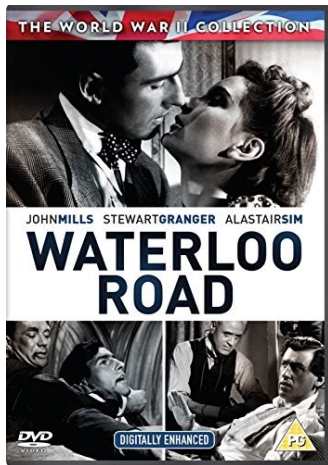
Dearden, Basil

Reg Wyer

Stanley Baker, Ann Heywood,
David McCallum, Peter Cushing

Late 50s British social problem drama set in Liverpool. Hard-boiled detective (Baker) is appointed, against his will, as a Police Juvenile Liaison Officer. Gets entangled with a gang of teenage hoods, some small children and a hostile young woman. One thing leads to another... McCallum is the gang leader and rebel without a cause, Heywood his elder sister, Cushing the local priest. Quasi-documentary style, shot on location in the grimy streets and tenements of Liverpool, a hideous creation of English industrialism!

Some of this is clumsy and certainly dated (the theme song being a spectacular case in point!) ... but it still has some kick. Not one of Dearden's best films but worth a look if you're interested in social history and the evolution of British cinema. One can see a clear lineage of "social problem" films from the late 40s through to the early 70s, as well as the influence of American films like **Blackboard Jungle**. The British social problem film, at least in this particular vein, probably reached its zenith with Ken Loach's films of the late 60s, early 70s. There are also links with the rash of TV series which appeared in the 60s and 70s — **Z Cars** and the like — and with the kitchen-sinkers.



WATERLOO ROAD

1944 D 3.50 6.7 GB

Gilliat, Sidney

Arthur Crabtree

John Mills, Joy Shelton, Stewart
Granger, Alistair Sim

Wartime London. Soldier Jim Colter (Mills), a regular guy, does a runner from his barracks when he hears that his wife (Shelton) is getting too close to Mr Smooth (Granger). An older doctor (Sim) looks over the various happenings with a benevolent eye. Wartime life in London goes on — bombing raids, fires, trains, life in the shelters, life in the streets.

It's a very modest little film which never yields much dramatic tension. But it's tidy. The plot is thin but the characters are credible, the performances competent enough (although Stewart is struggling a bit) and the picture of life in the city is closely observed. It ain't **This Happy Breed** — but I enjoyed it.



WAY AHEAD, THE

1944 A 3.50 7.1 GB2

Reed, Carol

Guy Green

David Niven, Jimmy Hanley,
Stanley Holloway, Trevor Howard,
William Hartnell

Take a cross-section of English types, throw them together in an army platoon for training: much grumbling, resentment of officers, bad food, hard yakka etc. By the time they get into combat they are a proficient fighting unit. Familiar? (American variants include **The Devil's Brigade** and **The Dirty Dozen**). The first hour is intermittently interesting and entertaining with a few fairly limp episodes along the way. Things finally heat up after the first hour with the shipboard scenes followed by action in North Africa. A tribute to the ordinary British soldier; war propaganda obviously (no cowards, bullies, malingerers or crooks amongst this lot, no sir!), but not over the top. Best sequences are on board the ship.

Started life as an army training documentary and was then transmuted into a feature which seems to have been released in three different lengths, the shortest being the American version (c.90 mins) which was released as **The Immortal Battalion**. (Assuming most of the cuts were to the first half the shorter version might be better.) Written by Eric Ambler and Peter Ustinov (who has a small part). Trevor Howard's screen debut.

The last forty minutes were excellent but the film overall was a little disappointing given Reed's later work. Niven seems to have had as much to do with production and direction as anyone.



WAY TO THE STARS, THE

1945 A 4.00 7.3 GB

Asquith, Anthony

Derick Williams

John Mills, Rosamund John,
Michael Redgrave, Basil Radford,
Trevor Howard, Douglass
Montgomery

1940-1944. English Air Force Base. Daily life on the base and in the local village. The poster says “Thrills in the sky and romance below”. Well, the thrills in the sky are pretty meagre as we never get off the ground but, yes, there’s some romance below. Redgrave, Mills and John are all rather good in an understated kind of way though one of them makes an all too early exit. Joyce Carey is appropriately irritating as the woman who never complains. The narrative elements are standard fare: bombing missions, fatalities, anxiety, tension; romances, grief, children; fun and games in the pub; camaraderie, humour, pathos. No surprises ... but it’s done with a light and skilful hand. Asquith went on to bigger and better things but this modest, unpretentious film, a heartfelt tribute to bomber pilots, deserves a honourable spot on his CV. He had already made **Pygmalion** and **We Dive at Dawn** as well as quite a number of others — but his best work was still ahead of him. Story by Terence Rattigan (at that time a F/Lt in the RAF). Very early and brief appearances by Trevor Howard, David Tomlinson and Jean Simmons.

In 1946 British readers of the *Daily Mail* voted this their favourite wartime film. (It did very little business on the other side of the Atlantic.)

Aka: **Johnny in the Clouds**



WE DIVE AT DAWN

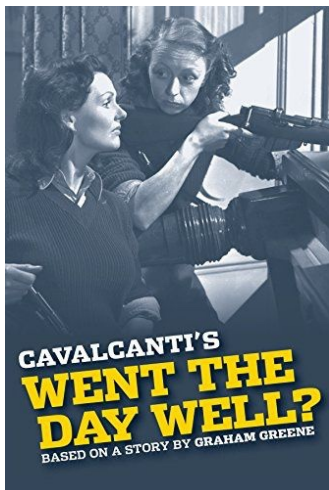
1943 A 3.50 6.8 GB2

Asquith, Anthony

Jack Cox

John Mills, Eric Portman, Jack
Watling

Follows the same formula as *In Which We Serve* but not quite as good despite splendid performances from Mills and Portman. The “men at work” theme is handled well. Technically impressive. Not much made of the captured Germans. Final action scene somewhat implausible. Good to see John Mills acting his age!
One of the more under-stated submarine films.



WENT THE DAY WELL?

1942 D 4.00 7.5 GB

Calvacanti, Alberto

Wilkie Cooper

Leslie Banks, CV France, Valerie Taylor, Frank Lawton, Mervyn Johns, David Farrer

From a wartime propaganda story (1940) by Graham Greene about a small English village taken over by a group of German paratroopers disguised as English soldiers. At first one is expecting something halfway between one of the Powell-Pressburger rural romances and *Dad's Army* but it soon transpires that such expectations are ill-founded. The villagers are not going to take it lying down! Some dark undertones and outbreaks of surprisingly graphic violence. The scriptwriters actually made some radical changes to Greene's story in which the poacher had figured much more prominently. A bit far-fetched but a film which manages simultaneously to convey the charm of an English village and the viciousness and brutality of war. A much bolder and more interesting film than the wildly popular flag-waver, **Mrs Miniver**, made in the same year. An Ealing film produced by Michael Balcon.

Alberto Calvacanti (1897-1982) was a Brazilian-born producer and director who lived in Switzerland, England, France, and Israel as well as Brazil. He worked for some years on Grierson's GPO Film Unit before joining Ealing where he made **WDW?**, **Dead of Night (45)**, and **They Made Me a Fugitive (47)** amongst others. He left in 1950 after a dispute with studio bosses.



WHISKY GALORE!

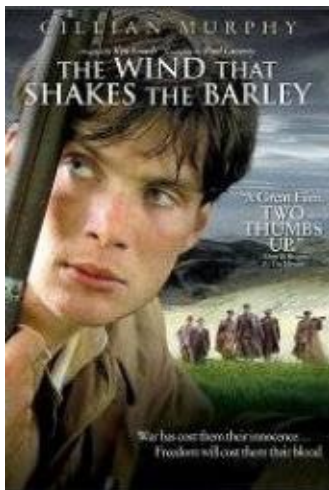
1949 C 4.25 7.3 GB

Mackendrick, Alexander

Gerald Gibbs

Basil Radford, Catherine Lacey,
Joan Greenwood, James Justice
Robertson, Gordon Jackson,
Wylie Watson

WW2, the Outer Hebrides. Crisis: the island has run out of whisky... but there is renewed hope when the *SS Cabinet Minister*, carrying a cargo of whisky, runs aground. All sorts of shenanigans as competing parties try to snare the booze. Based on Compton Mackenzie's comic and whimsical novel, **WG** is an affectionate portrait of an island community, beautifully shot by Gerald Gibbs. Wylie Watson (yje postmaster) is hilarious but he has plenty of support. It's not one of the funniest comedies ever made but it is altogether charming and very skilfully crafted by Mackendrick. A touch of the ethnographic qualities of **Man of Aran** and **The Edge of the World**. It's also a love song to whisky! One of the best films to come out of Ealing – and they produced quite a number. Much better than I was expecting!



WIND T SHAKES T BARLEY

2006 D 4.00 7.5 GB

Loach, Ken

Barry Ackroyd

Cillian Murphy, Liam
Cunningham, Padraic Delaney,
Orla Fitzgerald

Ireland, 1919-1922: the Irish struggle against the rapacious British imperialists and the brutal reign of terror by the Black 'n Tans, the treaty establishing the Free State, and the early days of the subsequent civil war and the growth of the IRA. The story revolves around two brothers whose commitment to the Irish cause eventually takes them in divergent directions. Loach's political commitments have never been a secret and they are clearly on display here: the ultimate responsibility for the tragic history of Ireland in the 20th century should be sheeted home to the British imperialists — the atrocities, stupidities and culpabilities of the Irish nationalists notwithstanding. However, it's less polemical and less ideological than one might have expected and is actually a complex dramatization of moral and political conundrums, and a condemnation of both imperialism and civil war. The device of making two of the principal players brothers was too facile, too factitious, a clumsy move by the scriptwriter. But there is much to like in this film, not least the quiet tone in which it explores the violence, brutality and cruelty which stems from these two evils. The beautiful landscape and the impoverished life of the ordinary rural folk are both evoked with some sensitivity. Nicely shot in muted greens and browns by Barry Ackroyd. The film is not in any sense a jaw-dropper or soul-shaker but it has plenty to recommend it. It won the Palme D'Or at Cannes. The Tory press in England reacted with predictable outrage and all manner of accusations and condemnations which simply proved that the critics in question were either very obtuse or, just as likely, had not seen the film!



WINGS OF THE DOVE, THE

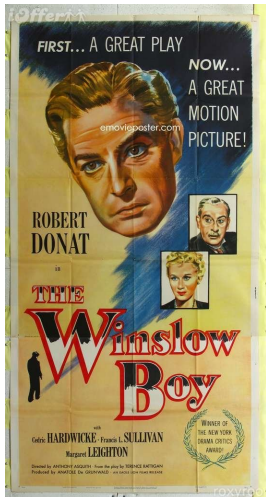
1997 D 4.50 7.2 GB

Softley, Iain

Eduardo Serra

Helena Bonham Carter, Linus Roache, Alison Elliott, Michael Gambon, Charlotte Rampling, Alex Jennings

Love and Death...and Money...in Venice, 1910. The prospect of a screen adaptation of any Henry James's exquisite and dense novels makes me very nervous. But this rendition of Henry James' masterly late novel about love, money and moral corruption is probably the best of them. Of course the film can't reproduce the finely elaborated moral and emotional complexities, ambiguities, refinements, discriminations and ramifications of the novel ... but it captures its spirit and sensibility marvellously well whilst also giving some of the novel's concerns a more contemporary inflection. Helena Bonham Carter is as impressive as I've seen her, Linus Roach is fine, Alison Elliott is magnificent and Elizabeth McGovern is excellent in a minor role. Hossein Amini deserves a gong for his script. I thought it was a mistake to cast Charlotte Rampling and Michael Gambon in their roles. I would have preferred a couple of unknowns. Henry James would not have approved of the gratuitous final sex scene — and nor do I, even though it captures something of the impasse into which their compromises have led them. The film has the characteristic visual beauty of the Ivory-Merchant productions but without their lapses into cloying pictorialism; this is, visually, more restrained, more muted and consequently all the more seductive. I am a totally committed Henry James enthusiast. This is the first screen adaptation with which I have been more or less satisfied, which is not to deny that some of the others have their attractions and distinctions. The next best, I think, is Wyler's wonderful late 40s **The Heiress**, based on *Washington Square*, distinguished by what was perhaps the best performance of Olivia de Havilland's career. I also liked the Ivory-Merchant **The Europeans**. **The Innocents** (Jack Clayton, 1961) is also a fine film but the narrative material (from *The Turn of the Screw*) is not typical James. The worst of the James adaptations I've seen is James Ivory's turgid adaptation of **The Bostonians**.



WINSLOW BOY, THE

1948 D 4.25 7.7 GB

Asquith, Anthony

Freddie Young

Robert Donat, Margaret Leighton,
Cedric Hardwicke, Francis
Sullivan, Basil Radford

Anthony Asquith's intelligent and tasteful 1948 screen adaptation of Terence Rattigan's 1946 play about a boy wrongfully expelled from the navy and the lengthy legal case which ensued. Based on a real-life 1912 *cause célèbre*. The film moves the accent from the father-son relationship to the enigmatic personality of the eminent barrister, nicely played by Robert Donat. Old favourites Ernest Thesiger, Wilfrid Hyde-White and Stanley Holloway have bit parts. Margaret Leighton's hair-do is unspeakable: how to turn an attractive woman into a frump. Leighton and Basil Radford have weathered quite well since **The Lady Vanishes**. (Quite a good remake in 1998 by David Mamet.)



WINSLOW BOY, THE

1999 D 4.00 7.4 GB

Mamet, David

Benoit Delhomme

Rebecca Pidgeon, Jeremy Northam, Nigel Hawthorne, Aden Gillett, Gemma Jones, Matthew Pidgeon

A pretty straight adaptation of the Terence Rattigan 1940s play, loosely based on an Edwardian *cause célèbre*, in which a young naval cadet is falsely accused of theft. His father (Nigel Hawthorne) is determined to clear his name no matter what the cost and hires the most eminent barrister of the day (Jeremy Northam).

This follows Anthony Asquith's stylish film of 1948. Mamet's film focuses more on the sexual undercurrents and family tensions than did its predecessors, and avoids the courtroom altogether. Mamet's film is highly literate, engrossing and gracefully done but perhaps a little lacking in real bite. (One unkind critic called it "a well-dressed corpse" — hugely unfair but one sees the point.) Nigel Hawthorne gives a delightful performance; he's the best of a good cast. Rebecca Pidgeon is David Mamet's wife (still!). Matthew Pidgeon — the Winslow boy — is her younger brother.

An intelligent, highly-watchable, well-crafted adult drama and period piece. But Asquith did it better.



WOMAN'S VENGEANCE, A

1948 M 3.50 6.9 GB

Korda, Zoltan

Russell Metty

Jessica Tandy, Dedric Hardwicke,
Charles Boyer, Ann Blyth, Jr.
Williams, Mildred Natwick,
Rachel Kempson

Melodrama/mystery scripted by Aldous Huxley from his own story, "The Gioconda Smile". Boyer is the selfish playboy husband, Rachel Kempson the miserable and bitter wife, and Ann Blyth the starry-eyed young lover. There is also a repressed lady friend (Tandy), a sour maid and the family doctor. Death. Suicide? Murder? Natural causes?

This takes a long time to fire up, and in the end one is left without very much. It's a film that adds up to less than its inviting parts — Huxley, a fine cast (though Ann Blyth has little to offer), Metty as cinematographer, a competent enough director. It's moderately entertaining, occasionally interesting and has some fine moments. But one wanted rather more. (The title is an unhappy spoiler from the get-go.)



WONDROUS OBLIVION

2003 D 4.00 7.0 GB

Morrison, Paul

Nina Kellgren

Sam Smith, Emily Woof, Delroy
Lindon, Leonie Elliott, Stanley
Townsend

Eleven-year old David Wiseman is a slightly nerdy cricket tragic but he's not much good at the game. A Jamaican family moves in next door, provoking some racist reverberations through the somewhat dishevelled London suburb. David's Jewish parents feel somewhat uncomfortable about their new neighbours but David strikes up a friendship with the next-door dad and his daughter who are both much more proficient at cricket than he is. Things move on from there. Practice nets in the backyard, cricket cards, reggae music, living cricket legends wandering into the story, sexual currents, schoolboy cricket, coming-of-age ... A closely-observed bitter-sweet comedy-drama with some delicately-tuned performances, nice period detail, quiet humour and some insights into the dynamics of racial division. The narrative arc is predictable but satisfying nonetheless. Not at all surprisingly the critics fell into three camps: the moderately enthusiastic; those who derided the feel-good social message; those who thought the treatment of racism a bit tepid. You can't win! In fact **Wondrous Oblivion** is a deftly handled, modest comedy-drama which, within its limits, works well. I enjoyed it a lot, especially the performances of Delroy Lindon as Dennis and Leonie Elliott as his daughter.

WRECK OF THE MARY DEARE



1959 D 3.50 6.8 GB

Anderson, Michael

Joe Ruttenberg

Gary Cooper, Charlton Heston,
Cecil Parker, Emyln Williams

The *Mary Deare* is abandoned by her crew after a fire on board — but one man (Cooper) stays on the ship, later to be discovered by salvage operator (Heston). The mystery thickens when the surviving crew member refuses to tell his story. The latter part of the film deals with the Board of Inquiry before a final action sequence back on board the marooned ship. Story from Hammond Innes novel, screenplay by Eric Ambler, cinematography by Joe Ruttenberg. A watchable drama generally well acted and competently directed by Anderson. A dash of sub-Conradian “madness at sea”, not a bad “courtroom” drama, and plenty of water and weather. Most of the distinguished cast don’t have a great deal to do. Cooper is the best of them.

Badly in need of more sophisticated special effects in the wreckage on the rocks scene. (The opening sequence, by contrast, is pretty good.)

Read Hammond Innes’ novel when I was about fourteen, so this was a trip back to school days. A maritime British drama ... and not a stiff upper lip to be seen: remarkable!



YESTERDAY'S ENEMY

1959 A 3.75 7.1 GB

Guest, Val

Arthur Grant

Stanley Baker, Guy Rolfe, Leo McKern, Gordon Jackson, Bryan Forbes, Philip Ahn, Percy Herbert, Richard Pascoe

Remnants of a British brigade lost in the Burmese jungle come across vital intelligence but face insuperable odds in rejoining the main force. Encircled by Japanese forces and troubled by internal tensions and moral dilemmas. Stanley Baker is the Hard Man commander, Guy Rolfe the padre and voice of conscience, Leo McKern a war correspondent. And, of course, as a British film made between 1940 and 1960, there must be a part for Gordon Jackson — the tough, loyal sergeant. Bewildered villagers, ruthless Japanese soldiers, a sophisticated and cultured Japanese commander, and lots of bird noises, not to mention dead bodies. Questions about means and ends. Baker the best of a competent cast. No one thinks they're anywhere but on a studio set but it really doesn't matter. No music. Nice clean print. The ironical title suits the material. Better-than-average anti-war drama out of the Hammer Studio. Quite possibly Val Guest's best.



YOUNG AND INNOCENT

1937 Th 3.50 7.0 GB2

Hitchcock, Alfred

Nova Pilbeam, Derrick De Marney, Percy Marmont, Edward Rigby

One of Hitch's earliest "Wrong Man" thrillers. It has many of Hitch's signature moves, themes and preoccupations, and there are a couple of dazzling sequences (including the famous capture of the villain) and anticipations of later films (**Rebecca** and **The Birds** perhaps most obviously). Nova Pilbeam (18 at the time of filming) is as delightful as her name. Edward Rigby (the tramp) later gave a splendid performance as the father in **The Stars Look Down**. De Marney is also quite appealing. There is much to enjoy. But if this didn't have Hitch's name on it we would reckon it an interesting, reasonably accomplished if flawed 1930s thriller in a minor key. The plot is a bit feeble and some of the humour rather club-footed. Taken from a novel by Josephine Tey who wrote some excellent thrillers in the 30s and 40s, several of which were adapted for the screen.

Y&I is really a poor man's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.

Aka **The Girl Was Young** (true enough: she was).



ZULU

1964 A 3.75 7.8 GB2

Endfield, Cy

Stephen Dade

Stanley Baker, Michael Caine,
Nigel Green, Jack Hawkins, Ulla
Jacobsson

Heroic stand by small band of British soldiers (mainly Welsh) in a war against the Zulus, 1879 — but not “rally round the flag” as it questions the imperial ethos, militarism etc. without ever becoming polemical or a Message film. It has plenty of attractions: magnificent spectacle and superb use of the landscape; excellent cinematography and sound; interesting representation of the Zulus; several arresting sequences; Michael Caine in his first film role and Nigel Green (then little known) in very fine form. On the other hand... Too long by at least twenty minutes; the human characters not as interesting or as well developed as they might have been (in this respect **Guns At Batasi** is superior); some of the battle scenes (of which there were too many) are unconvincing; unsatisfactory roles for Jack Hawkins and Ulla Jacobsson (who are sensibly expelled from the narrative about two thirds of the way through).

Shot in the magnificent Drakensberg National Park during the apartheid era, with the cooperation of both the Zulus and the South African government; must have been some skilful diplomacy required. Produced by Baker with narration (unmistakably by Richard Burton, BUT for the American version apparently the narration was done by William Holden!). Despite its epic scale and seemingly immense cast it was not a big budget production. Superb Blu-Ray print. Cy Endfield's finest hour by a very wide margin.